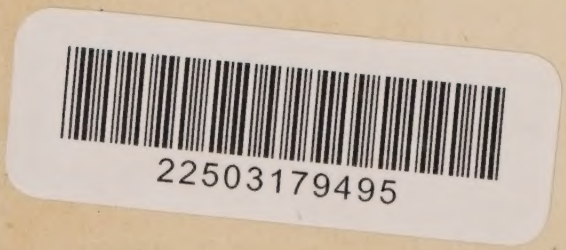
THE PERFECT WOMAN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THE PERFECT WOMAN

THE

PERFECT WOMAN

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
OF CHARLES SAINTE-FOI

BY

ZÉPHIRINE N. BROWN

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"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command;
And yet a spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light."

PREFACE

IT often happens that one is in need of an adviser, and yet has no suitable person to consult. In such a case, a safe and trustworthy book may help one to come to a right decision and to read correctly feelings, doubts, or aspirations not clearly defined. Such is the mission of this little volume.

The young woman, fresh from school, and considering the subject of her vocation, may get assistance herein; while the mother will find matter for serious reflection.

The woman who must live in the world and who nevertheless aspires to high ideals, will find here instructions and suggestions for quiet hours. She will see many a contrast drawn between the worldly and the unworldly, the unenlightened and the en-

lightened; and the portrayal of the latter class will give her a livelier sense of her mission, a clearer view of her duties as wife and mother, a deeper knowledge of her relations to others.

It seems opportune in these days of innovation and effort to reach perfection through some new light and by other paths than those trodden by the saints of God, to see depicted the strong and noble woman drawing inspiration from the fountain of truth and having ever before her mind the model of all women, — Mary, virgin and mother.

As the original of this book in French has been a safeguard and help to many, so it is to be hoped that this translation may perform a like service for its English readers.

Z. N. BROWN.

JUNE 24, 1901.

NOTE

SOME passages in the original, being applicable exclusively to the women of France, have been purposely omitted. Many allusions, however, to the customs and conditions of that country have been retained wherever the truths connected therewith appeared to have a general application.

It has also seemed best to condense certain other passages and omit expressions, without indicating the same in the text, when the train of thought has not been perceptibly interrupted, or the teachings of the author lost.

THE TRANSLATOR.

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The PERFECT WOMAN

I

ON THE DIGNITY AND CHARACTER OF WOMAN

FEW indeed are the men who understand and appreciate the dignity of womanhood. Many of them think a woman an inferior being, unmistakably destined by her very nature to be the slave of man. It is true, indeed, some are willing to look upon her as appointed by Providence to adorn their lives and exert a charm over them; but this point of view, though apparently nobler, is scarcely more honorable for woman, and fails none the less to recognize her nature and dignity. However, many women, by a deplorable delusion, carry their pretensions and thoughts no higher. It is enough for their intellects and their hearts to believe themselves elected solely to embellish the life of man and to preserve him from sorrow and ennui. It is even true to say that the mistakes and sufferings of the majority of them proceed from the fact

that they do not sufficiently understand the aim and mission assigned them by Providence, and that they do not adequately esteem themselves in their own eyes. For the respect they have for themselves is at once both the warrant and measure of that which men bear to them; and the woman who does not know how to command the respect and esteem of man is very near being culpable and unhappy.

Deceived by the false descriptions of romances, or the insidious flattery of men, who seek to beguile them, women have the strangest delusions about themselves and their mission in the world. It is neither to passion nor poetry that they should look for the secret of this mission, but to the one faith and to the teachings of Christianity, which have a solution for every doubt, a key for every mystery; it is to that religion which has loudly proclaimed and indubitably proved by the argument of facts, the strength of weakness, and the marvellous power of those things which are not, which God uses to confound and vanquish those things that are.

As He chose, indeed, the humblest of all women to accomplish through her the mystery of the Incarnation, so has He more than once chosen women to execute the designs of His

mercy on certain nations. Is it not to the intervention and salutary influence of woman that several nations of Europe owe the knowledge of the true God and the light of the Gospel? These people seem to have wished to show their gratitude toward woman for so great a benefit by placing on her brow a halo, as it were, of glory and honor. It is, in fact, among these people that woman's influence has made itself felt more deeply in the morals and customs of human life. That influence has impressed on them a something, I know not what, of tenderness and grace which distinguishes them, and which, reflecting itself both in history and public life, has given them that character of devotion and generosity which we admire even to-day.

Before the Son of God had given us life through His death, and repaired our strength through the divine weakness of His passion, the world was under the dominion of violence, which was mistaken for power, the only attribute then known of the Divinity. Women, children, and slaves were counted for naught: they had no rights, and as a consequence no duty was owing to them. But when men saw God working the greatest things with the smallest means, shattering the strongest obstacles with the weakest instruments, they understood that there is some-

thing above strength, and that, God not having need of us to manifest the power of His arm, all our power consists in yielding ourselves like docile instruments into His hands, and in letting Him do with us as He pleases.

It is for this reason that a woman, though in many respects weaker than a man, is, nevertheless, often superior to him; and God has sometimes chosen her in preference to man to execute through her the designs of His mercy and love. In circumstances requiring great adaptation, or entire submission, or unalterable patience, or perfect resignation, a woman is usually superior to a man, and shows a perseverance of which the latter cannot always prove capable. Is there question of hoping, of waiting, of temporizing, or of preparing by a gentle action, slow and gradual, yet constant, a result which can be only the effect of time and which violent or sudden measures would inevitably bring to naught? Woman, as if following the bent of her nature, does without effort what man could not do except by utterly vanquishing his own nature. Is one's soul to be touched by charity or compassion? Is one's heart to be dilated, opened, and all its love poured out without stint? Are tears to be shed over some great misfortune? Is a dear thought, a precious remembrance, or a sacred

hope to be preserved in the innermost recesses of one's being? Who among men, in straits and circumstances like these, would dare to think himself superior to woman?

If a man knows how to act with more force and perseverance, a woman knows how to suffer with more constancy and energy. Now, life is so full of misery and anguish, there is so much suffering in this world, and there are so many occasions in which we need patience and resignation, that it is difficult to say what thing is more necessary here below, — the strength that enables us to act, or that which helps us to suffer.

If man has a vaster and loftier comprehension, which can see things from a higher plane, and embrace a greater number of them at once, woman has a more delicate and subtile mind. She can better seize details and will often perceive an imperfection or suspect a difficulty which would have escaped man's vision. The latter can better compel others by the ascendancy of his authority, sway them by the power of his genius, convince them by the force of his reason, and govern them by the wisdom of his counsels or the unflinching firmness of his will; but woman can oftener conquer them by the ascendancy of virtue, and persuade them by the graces of

her mind or by the gentleness and affability of her manners; she can triumph with her heart over their wills, and by giving them hers, make herself mistress of theirs.

Man attacks directly; he goes straight to his object, because he has the consciousness and pride, as it were, of his strength. If on his way he meets no obstacle, or if those which he does meet can be overcome by an energetic and violent effort, he reaches his aim more quickly and surely than woman. But if the obstacles be of such a nature that they cannot be directly overcome, and must be avoided by a long circuit, it often happens that in striving to overcome them he himself is overcome, and loses by his impatience and haste all the fruit of his labor and efforts. Woman, on the other hand, generally attacks indirectly, and advances toward her aim rather by the ways that appear to her the surest than by those that seem shortest; because she has the consciousness of her weakness, and accepts with resignation the position that this weakness gives her and the necessities it imposes. Thus she sometimes fails to attain her object by being too slow or undecided, or because, distrusting herself too much, she has not that zeal and vigor which give the certainty of success, and often render it easier.

But at other times, also, this conviction of her weakness, and the prudence that is the result of it, serve her most wonderfully. Skilful in warding off obstacles which cannot be overcome, she obtains by time what she cannot at the present moment snatch by strength. She does not fear to give up and fall back before an unforeseen difficulty, in order to return to the struggle afterward stronger and better prepared. She accomplishes some of those masterly retreats that often require more skill and genius than a victory, and which cause the conquering enemy to lose a part of his advantage. Supple and flexible as a reed, she yields under the gusts of wind and tempest; whereas man, like an oak, is sometimes shattered while endeavoring to withstand them.

It is especially in misfortune that woman is truly strong and that her greatness is manifested in all its splendor. Like to the willow growing on the border of the river and bending its weeping branches over the flowing waves, the heart of woman seems to grow young again and take on a new life in grief and tears. Adversity, which dismays and overthrows man, uplifts her, on the contrary, and multiplies her energy. Forgetting herself to think only of others, she is capable of carrying the burden of her own grief

and of alleviating the sufferings of those whom she loves. Her soul expands and grows, and the features of her countenance seem to bloom afresh under their rain of tears and clothe themselves with a new beauty.

II

ON THE MISSION OF WOMAN

MOTHERHOOD is at once the object of woman's life, the cause of her liveliest joys, and the source of her deepest sorrows. In a certain sense it can be said that a woman is born a mother, and that as soon as her mind begins to catch the faintest glimpse of the object for which she was created, her heart instinctively inclines to it with all the strength of which she is capable. Or rather her heart, here as always, outstrips her reason; it has the presentiment of things the latter does not yet see, and which it will understand only later. While a child, she plays with a mother's functions and duties, which, some day, are to be so serious and, perhaps, so full of sorrow for her; in her games she tries to be a mother; she clings to the object devoid of life and motion given her to occupy her leisure; she feels for it maternal tenderness and solicitude; so well do the functions of a mother suit her nature.

And if to follow a higher vocation, she renounces the joys arising from the motherhood that proceeds from flesh and blood, it is to consecrate herself to the functions of a holier and loftier motherhood, since it is all spiritual in its nature and in its end. She becomes the spouse of Jesus Christ, in order to become, through compassion and charity, the mother either of little children, whom she nourishes with the milk of the doctrine of life; or of the sick and infirm, whom she surrounds with her attentions, purifies with her prayers, consoles by her conversations, and edifies by her example. Or else, devoting herself to a ministry still more painful, and on that account more meritorious, she becomes the mother of those poor, sinful women who have wearied themselves in the ways of iniquity and whom she brings forth to Jesus Christ by reviving in their souls grace that had become withered under the breath of the most unruly and shameful passions.

Others, finally, consecrating themselves to a still more sublime occupation, make of their whole lives, so to speak, a long sigh of love and continual prayer whose unspeakable groans call down unceasingly upon the earth new benedictions and graces. They do not, however, renounce the glorious privilege of motherhood, for it is in their

hearts, always inflamed with love, that are formed those germs of salvation and life that the breath of the spirit carries into languishing or withered souls, and that grace afterward fructifies with its divine heat. The ungrateful world looks upon their lives as useless and idle, and among those who accuse them, many, perhaps, will one day owe them the light that will have dispelled the darkness from their minds, and the grace that will have cheered the last days of a life passed in forgetfulness of God and in neglect of their duties.

These two motherhoods, that of the spirit and that of the flesh, were united by God in Mary, whom He chose to be His mother. Mary, in fact, as the Fathers observe, before conceiving in her chaste womb the author of our salvation, had conceived Him in her heart by prayer, faith, and love. She was at the same time mother of Jesus Christ and of the principle that He represented and that He came to carry out here below. For she associated herself voluntarily with the work of salvation which He wished to effect, with all the labors of His life, with all the sufferings of His passion, all the bitterness of His death. And that is why the Church in her worship and in her prayers does not separate Mary from her Divine Son. That fact explains the

singular veneration she has vowed to Mary, the unlimited confidence of the faithful in her powerful intercession, and the praise that the Fathers and Doctors bestow on this blessed creature, who knew how to unite in her sacred person and holy life the two functions and the two states between which every woman must choose, because no other than she can embrace them both at the same time.

In order to make man understand his dignity, Saint Leo in one of his sermons delivered on the feast of Christmas invites him to consider Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation. Can we not, by following the thought of this holy doctor, present, to the minds and hearts of all women, Mary as the one who, summing up in herself all the qualities and virtues that distinguish her sex, is fit, indeed, to make them understand the dignity of their nature and functions? Virgins or mothers, wives or those called to live in celibacy, all women can cast their eyes on Mary, and consider her at once the source of their glory and the ideal to be realized in their own lives.

If you should ever entertain doubt of the great destiny to which God calls you, consider Mary; contemplate the aureole of glory crowning her brow and the height of the pedestal whereon the faith and gratitude of nations have placed her sacred

image; you will at once feel your soul exalted in humble triumph, and you will understand that you are something great in the eyes of God and in the designs of His providence.

There is no position, no circumstance in her life wherein a woman cannot look upon Mary and learn something from her. Is she a mother? Let her consider Mary bearing her Divine Son in her arms; let her admire in her heavenly gaze and in all her features her holy joys of motherhood. After that what woman dare say that the title of mother is not something grand and noble; or be dismayed or troubled at the anguish and sorrows of which this glorious title is the source. Let her listen with holy respect to the words of the aged Simeon addressed to the mother of Jesus, when she presented her Son in the temple: "A sword," said he, "shall pierce thy soul," and she will glory in the sufferings produced in her own heart by the sword of maternal love.

If, on the contrary, God calls her to serve Him in the state of virginity, let her contemplate the image of Mary Immaculate; let her listen to her reply to the angel coming to announce to her that she was to become the Mother of God, and let her after that say whether virginity is not a glorious state supremely to be envied, since Mary would have preferred it to divine

motherhood, had God not miraculously united in her these two states.

Mary conceived, gave birth to, nourished, brought up Jesus, her Son according to the flesh, and the eternal Son of God. Then, when the time to accomplish His mission had come, He made His mother understand, at the marriage feast of Cana of Galilee, that the common life which had united them until that hour was about to cease for a time. But later, when He had to drink to the dregs the chalice of His passion, we find Mary once more near Him at the foot of the cross, receiving His last sigh and His last word. These sad duties accomplished, we no longer hear of Mary: her name appears no more in the Gospels nor in the letters of the Apostles; and all that we know of her has come to us through the tradition of the Church, faithful to the remembrance of the Mother of God.

What does this mean? When Jesus is born, while He is a child, weak and little, Mary appears in some way in the foreground. Her name is written on every page of the sacred books that relate to us His divine infancy and the first events of that blessed life. We see her disappear when the public life and the apostleship of her Son begins, to reappear when the time of His suffering, His passion and death, comes. There is in

that a great mystery. The whole secret of the mission, the end, the functions, and the life of a woman is contained in this mystery.

First, man is subject to woman, placed under the salutary influence of her tenderness and gentle authority, as long as he is feeble and has need of those delicate and careful attentions, those infinite precautions, that woman's heart alone understands. When the time to act comes, man passes to the stronger and graver authority of the father. On leaving, so to speak, the heart of his mother, he finds the reason and understanding of his father, whose counsels should direct his life and enlighten his mind. But let grief or sickness nail him to a bed as to a cross, his mother, his wife, or his sister will appear like a guardian angel, and will come to reclaim the glorious right vested in woman to alleviate all sufferings, console all griefs, and care for all infirmities. To man belongs the midday of life, the time of action, of apostleship, and of strength: to woman, the beginning and the end, the time of passion, of weakness, and of sorrow. To her belongs the cradle, the cross, the grave. There is not, in fact, a cradle over which you may not see bending the smiling yet anxious face of a woman. There is not a cross at the foot of which you may not find motionless and weep-

ing a mother, a wife, or a sister. There is not a grave which may not be watered by the tears of a woman and consecrated by her sorrow.

But we must carry our thoughts higher; and, after having considered woman's functions in the realities of life, we must study them, also, in the higher sphere of thought. Mary conceived in time the Word of God made flesh: she nourished Him; she presided over His physical development, and assisted Him in the agonies of His passion and death. It is to woman also, it is to her cares and solicitude that God usually confides the beginning and the end of things. It is often she who, in the family, conceives, brings to light, and develops those thoughts of grace and salvation which man, born for action, executes and realizes.

It is she also who receives these thoughts in her heart and embalms them in her remembrances and hopes, when a husband or a son, seduced by the false splendor of pleasure or honor, lets faith and its accompanying virtues wither in his soul. Like unto Mary, who received in her arms the body of her Divine Son when it was taken down from the cross, or to the holy women who went to His sepulchre to await His resurrection, the Christian woman keeps the dying faith of her husband or son un-

til God, conquered by her prayers and tears, revives it in their hearts.

How many wives, how many mothers, weep and hope for the objects of their tenderness! How many are seated on the graves wherein lie buried the souls of their husbands or sons and anxiously ask themselves as did the holy women: "Oh, who shall take away the stone of the sepulchre?" For one does not know what infinite power of remembrance and hope resides in the depths of a woman's heart, and how persistent she is in her desires and prayers. Man is generally overpowered by man, convinced by the force of his demonstrations, or swayed by the fire of his vehement eloquence; it is oftener by woman that God allows himself to be moved and overcome. It is she who by her incessant prayers wins from God those fine victories the happy fruits of which move us to admiration.

III

ON THE MISSION OF WOMAN
(*continued*)

WOMAN should fully understand the nature and importance of her mission, since on the manner in which she shall accomplish it, depends, perhaps, in great part the future of our country. If men make the laws, it can be said that women make the morals; and if it is true that laws have in the long run a great influence on morals, it is none the less true that morals react in time on laws, so that it would be difficult to say what function is the more important in society, that of woman, who shapes the morals, or that of man, who makes the laws.

It is certain that a nation without faith is inevitably destined to perish sooner or later, because nations, as well as individuals, cannot live without a principle of life to animate and sustain them. Now, there is no other principle of life for a nation than faith and well-established religious convictions which may be reflected in its

legislation and in all its social customs, and which may give to its history a glorious and divine end.

What a difference between woman's condition in that epoch of our history when faith still directed all the relations of life, and that which the incredulity of modern times has brought about! In that epoch of faith, woman in society was like a being of a superior nature, in whom shone forth with particular brightness the holy image of God. Those men of iron for whom strength was everything, and whose habits and laws were impressed with a character of harshness conformable to their energetic and vigorous natures, knew, when at home, how to respect woman's weakness and recognize all that there is of grandeur and power concealed under her frail body and weak members. Barbarous while away from home on their adventurous expeditions, they found again at their firesides all the charms of a truly Christian civilization, and they knew how to enjoy them. Man reigned in the camps or in the political assemblies; woman reigned in the home and in the family. Public life belonged to the former: woman directed by her counsels and governed by her influence all the relations of domestic or private life, and her slow yet beneficial action wrought its triumph over the rude and coarse manners of that epoch, by intro-

ducing into legislation and popular customs the spirit of devotion and sacrifice.

The contrary happens to-day. Man finds and enjoys away from home all the advantages of a civilization often artificial and corrupt. Absorbed in the interests of public life or in his business cares, consumed by pride and ambition, preyed upon by avarice and envy, he places limits neither to his desires nor to his earthly hopes. He returns home only to feel bored, and to weary those who are obliged to live with him. He has spent during the day all he had of strength or life in his intellect and heart: he brings to his family only emptiness and exhaustion. What can a woman do under these circumstances? what course shall she take? If, through weariness, or instinct, or choice, she follows her husband in the ways wherein his life is spent, nothing will furnish any longer the equilibrium to this preponderance of material interests; and they will end by absorbing the soul completely, without leaving in it any desire, any hope which may rise above this earth.

How many families, alas! expect nothing after this life, never feel the need of raising their eyes toward heaven, and of resting in prayer or holy thoughts, from the ungrateful labor and miseries to which man is condemned here below! As

soon as woman loses courage and renounces the sublime rôle that God has assigned her in the family, just so soon do Christian ideas disappear and a kind of savagery implants itself and takes root, — a savagery much more fatal than that of nations which have not enjoyed the blessings of Christianity; because it is intensified by all the vices of an artificial and refined civilization, and by all the resources which this civilization places at its disposal.

If to obey her conscience and to preserve, as much as possible, a spark of the sacred fire, a woman attaches herself to heaven more and more in proportion as her husband clings to earth, how many struggles, how many conflicts, how much anguish will, perhaps, result from this disagreement and opposition! Moreover, will not her words and examples lose much of their influence and weight, opposed, as they will be, by the contrary tendency and direction of her husband? For, unfortunately, as a consequence of the corruption of our nature, what attracts us towards earth has very often more power over us than that which raises us toward heaven. What sorrows, what anguish, what groans, of which God alone is witness! How many women whose hearts have become an abyss of grief and, as it were, a fountain of tears, are discouraged

with the uselessness of their efforts! For the more a woman understands what is noble and appreciates the price of what is beautiful, the more difficult it is to resign herself to see the beings she loves most in this world shut themselves up in the narrow and miserable circle of material enjoyments, and forget that "not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."

Family life, so sweet for souls that can contribute noble sentiments and group themselves about a holy thought, disappears in this manner; and thus it is, too, that morals, which can be formed only in the family, gradually vanish to make place for habits, instincts, conventional usages, artificial customs having no root in the true nature of man, no aim and no relation to his real end, and lessening his primitive energy by subjecting his life to capricious formulas and humiliating despotism.

Morals once destroyed, it does not take long to corrupt laws, and soon the excess of evil becomes so great that men, the most confident and hopeful, no longer see any remedy for it. Thanks to God, things have not yet reached this pass with us! But must we wait until the evil has become incurable to apply the remedy? Yet who can deny that it has gained great head-

way? Therefore, woman's mission has not been, possibly, at any epoch greater or more difficult, since it has for its object to prevent the invasion of barbarism, the result of corruption of morals and the degradation of the intellect; to preserve the faith, and the hopes of which it is the source, in the midst of an unbelieving people absorbed in earthly interests; to restore to family life the place it should occupy and the importance it should have; to reform morals by a slow yet unremitting force, and to prepare in this manner the reform of laws and social customs.

IV

ON MEANS WHEREBY WOMAN CAN ACCOMPLISH HER MISSION

TO accomplish their sublime mission, women who understand it and feel the courage to devote themselves to it, should, first of all, entertain in their souls the spirit of faith by a fervent life, constant prayer, and the fervent practice of all the Christian virtues. They should study carefully and deeply meditate on the great truths of Christianity and the duties proceeding from it. Only too often women content themselves in this matter with a superficial study which leaves their minds without reply to the objections they will be obliged to hear later on, and their hearts without support against the inevitable seductions they will find in their paths. Moreover, it is only by a really thorough religious instruction that women can take in the family the place belonging to them, and exercise that salutary influence required of them by the actual needs of society.

Means to Accomplish Her Mission

They must be able to make their husbands and sons listen to them; and their words must have the authority and power that renders them efficacious, and makes them command the attention of even those least disposed to hear them. And if the admonitions of a wife and a mother are without result; if even, far from producing the effect intended, they excite in the hearts of those to whom they are addressed a kind of contempt, — it is sometimes because they seem to have no foundation and hence do not carry with them that sanction given by a thorough knowledge of the truths of Christianity.

Man does not like to obey; whatever presents itself to him in the absolute form of a command repels him; and even when he yields to the ascendancy exercised over him, he likes to convince himself that he is doing only what is proved to him by his own reason. Now, the admonitions of a woman whose religious instruction has been neglected are given only under the form of a command, since she cannot maintain them by reasons that prove their truth. This thorough instruction is so much the more necessary to woman, because men, thinking themselves generally far superior, and having a poor opinion of woman's intellect, distrust her teachings and receive them, if not with contempt, at least with

an indifference much resembling disdain and in practice having the same results.

But an educated and truly superior woman always knows how to take the place belonging to her in the family and in society; and once her superiority is well recognized, it gives her the right to say and do things that a man of eminent merit could, perhaps, neither do nor say. It gives to her words and counsels a peculiar authority, against which men, the most wary, do not place themselves on guard, because they carry with them that characteristic gentleness and good-will which woman knows how to impart to everything that is hers; whereas, the more strict and concise demonstrations of man carry with them a characteristic of constraint and violence, offensive to the very susceptible pride of those whom he addresses.

Must then a woman, rising above her nature, intrude her mind into all the controversies that circle about the Christian religion, and must she be fitted to reply to every objection wherewith it may be attacked? Far from us such a thought. The religious instruction of a woman should not be the same as that of a man, because her nature and mission are different. It is not the critical part and the logical progress of Christian doctrine that women should study, but it is its magnificent

entirety and its splendid unity. It is that part understood as well by the heart as by the mind, — that part which rather excites the admiration and enthusiasm of the soul than carries conviction to the reason; that part which addresses itself to the faculty whence springs the source of noble instincts and generous feeling.

And surely that part of Christian doctrine is neither the least beautiful nor the least important. Here is a singular contrast: woman, who in practical matters perceives details better than man and cannot like him embrace the whole, manifests in intellectual matters an opposite disposition. She cannot follow, as man does, a reasoning to its last consequence, she will not perceive, as he does, the defect in an argument and the false conclusion, because reason and understanding are not the ruling faculties of her soul, and also, because she is as impatient in her intellect as she is patient in her heart and will. But what need has she to follow all the steps of a close process of reasoning, if, grasping its principle, she immediately catches a glimpse of all the consequences; or rather if the principle strikes her mind so forcibly through its grandeur or power that she cannot help admiring it forthwith? Woman's intellect is not logical, it is intuitive; it does not reason, it contemplates; it

is not convinced but influenced. Eloquence will have more power over her than philosophy. Ideas strike her more by their beauty and grandeur than by their truth. And those who are intrusted with the education of women should take good account of this bent of their minds; if they do not, their lessons and teachings will be fruitless, because we can receive ideas only according to the nature that God has given our intellect.

Religious instruction would be of little use to a woman, if it were not seconded by an earnest life, austere morals, and serious habits. It is not sufficient that she give others a high opinion of her intelligence; it is much more important that she make her character respected and her heart and life admired. If women understood fully the grandeur of the mission, I was about to say the apostleship, with which God has charged them to-day, they would watch with scrupulous attention over all their actions and words, for fear of compromising by any imprudence the success of that mission.

The first condition for them, if they wish to succeed in this excellent work, is to forget themselves, get out of themselves, in order to enter with all their souls into the very heart of the idea they wish to realize. It is to have in

view only the glory of Him whose messengers they are, and the utility of those to whom He sends them. It is to seek in these holy conquests, not a selfish success, a means of displaying the graces of their minds and of absorbing the minds of others, but the triumph of an idea, a means to make Him, to whom they have consecrated their lives, better loved, and to make shine in the minds of others the light with which they themselves have been enlightened.

Unfortunately vanity and the preoccupations of self-love often compromise in women the success of their apostleship. It is difficult for them to renounce completely that secret desire of pleasing that lies in the depths of their nature and is, all unknown to them, the motive of nearly all their actions. It is only sincere piety and constant vigilance over themselves that can, I do not say uproot that instinct, but repress its development and arrest its fatal results. A woman who would join to a sound education a perfect disinterestedness and entire abandonment to God, would be, in His hands, an instrument of mercy and salvation whose power it is difficult to calculate. It is not to herself, but to God, that she should convert others; it is not herself, but God and His truth, that she must render agreeable. She has power and strength

for good only as she acts, not in her own name, but in the name of Him from whom *comes all our sufficiency*. God communicates His virtue and power to our words and works only as we speak and act in His spirit and for His glory. If we act for ourselves He withdraws His help from us, and our action is without result.

A woman, frivolous in her life, capricious in her tastes, trifling in her speech, thinking everywhere and always of pleasing, absorbed in herself, in the make-up of her face and manners, without modesty or simplicity; a woman for whom piety is not the only essential thing, dominating all life, governing all relations, ruling and directing all thoughts and actions; a woman who thinks she is pious because she has introduced into her rule of life and into the account of her daily actions a few exercises of piety; a woman who is not profoundly humble and entirely devoted to God and His glory: such a woman is quite unfit for the apostleship here in question, and if she wishes to undertake it she will make few conquests to the truth; or rather, far from conquering souls to God, she will let her own be conquered, and perhaps will become the slave of those whom she wished to win.

But if, on the other hand, she is fully enlightened on her mission, and if she unites all the

conditions that its accomplishment requires, the good that she is called to do is incalculable. She will be like the angel guardian of the family; she will reign in her house, not to establish there her own kingdom, but that of God. Her words, always imbued with the celestial perfume that fills her soul, will bring peace and joy to the souls of others. Her manner, always calm and kindly, will hold in respect those who surround her, and will prevent many unsuitable words, many dangerous discussions.

She will know how to direct the conversation in such a way as to make it serious and instructive, without its being on that account fastidious and monotonous; she will, from time to time, know how to give that piquant and graceful turn which lends new charms; she will resume the conversation when it ceases, calm it when it becomes excited, stop it when it proves unbecoming. By the gentle authority that she exercises over minds and hearts, she will prevent discussions or objections unfavorable to religion; or, if she cannot prevent them, she will know how to answer them in a few short words that will convince those to whom they are addressed, or, at least, will induce them to conduct the discussion with more moderation, justice, and impartiality.

Her kind warning will always be well received

by those whom she wishes to chide; and her reproaches themselves, mingled always with gentleness and compassion, will enhance in the soul of a brother, a husband, or a son, the respect and confidence which she had inspired in them. They will come and seek her advice before acting; they will look for encouragement after they have commenced, as well as for praises or reproaches when they have finished. When they will not consult her reason they will consult her heart, and they will listen with respectful confidence to her counsels, especially if she can avoid a certain immoderate zeal and that artificial exaggeration and hasty judgment so common with women whose education has been neglected or whose minds have not been matured and calmed by experience. Again her heart will be consulted and her counsels be asked, if by the observation of her own heart and that of others she has known how to acquire that wisdom, prudence, gentle moderation, and calmness of mind and will which give so much weight to counsels, so much force and persuasion to words.

This is the portrait of a woman apostle, of a woman capable of exercising the sublime mission intrusted to her by Providence. To these worthy and thoughtful women truly belong power and influence, the faculty of doing good, of uplifting

and sanctifying all that surrounds them. Others may think they reign, but they are slaves; they may think they have power, but they are powerless, because they have not known how to command the respect and veneration that constitute the whole strength of a woman.

V

ON MEANS WHEREBY WOMAN CAN ACCOMPLISH HER MISSION

(*continued*)

HOW far should the circle of activity and apostleship devolving on woman extend? This question cannot be settled in a uniform manner; and the diversity of positions wherein a woman may be placed must necessarily modify the answer that is to be given. It can be said in every case that the family is the first and natural circle of this activity, and that, consequently, it is in the family that it should be primarily exercised. There are few women, in fact, who have not in that circle a well-marked apostleship and clearly determined duties. One woman has a husband, another a brother, another a father, a mother, a sister, claiming all her zeal and charity.

Has one not seen more than once a father brought back to God by the examples of virtue he had received from a dear daughter? And when words and examples are useless, has not a

woman still prayer, which should never be silent in her heart, and with which she can overcome the obstinacy of those she loves and wishes to lead back to God? There is in the devotion, the tenderness, and the delicate attentions of a daughter or a sister, of a mother or a wife, a power that often she herself does not suspect.

When a woman has acquired by her age and experience a position that allows her, without danger to herself and the cause she serves, to extend the sphere of her zeal and apostleship, she should not shrink before the mission God confides to her; but she should, on the contrary, while following the rules of prudence and modesty, seek every occasion that presents itself to make truth loved by those who do not yet know it. For that purpose she has many means at her disposal. If by the rank she occupies in the world, she is obliged to entertain numerous relations, far from grieving at this necessity and sighing for the delights of solitude, let her accept frankly the position that circumstances have made for her and let her derive profit from it for the glory of God and the service of others. There is no station in the world that has not its advantages and disadvantages. Each one should be satisfied with her own and not desire any other. Let those who live far from the world and in

solitude thank God for having given them the means of belonging to Him alone; and let those who are obliged to live in the world bless God for having furnished them the opportunity of procuring His glory by being useful to others.

To a woman deeply impressed with the sacredness of her apostleship, everything may be a means of practising it. There is no circumstance, no act, however little it may seem, that cannot furnish the opportunity of preaching Jesus Christ, without others even suspecting her intention. It is preaching Him to pay a visit to a frivolous, giddy woman, or receive her call, with the intention of raising a moment her mind and heart above the miseries that habitually absorb her. It is preaching Jesus Christ to act as a confidante, or to elicit a heart's confession with the desire of giving good advice and bringing back to God a young woman led away, perchance, by the love of the world.

It is preaching Jesus Christ to go and see a sick person with the thought of watching his soul, so to speak, at the exit of life, and of obtaining for him the help of religion of which he might, perhaps, be deprived. It is preaching Jesus Christ to go and visit a soul in distress in the hope of making her feel the nothingness of

the things of this world, and making her understand that there is no true and lasting happiness except in the service of God and the practice of virtue. It is preaching Jesus Christ to stop in a company scandalous discussion or improper topic; to protest by the modesty and simplicity of one's attire against the culpable excesses of luxury, and the immodesty of certain women who, unable to arrest attention by grace of mind or distinction of manners, endeavor to attract notice by flattering the dangerous passions of the heart.

It is preaching Jesus Christ to invite to one's table, or to a reunion of an evening, persons whom one knows or likes, with the intention of making piety lovable to them, and of proving that, far from being inconsistent with the duties of one's position or even with the honest pleasures that the weakness of one's nature renders necessary, it elevates them, and sanctifies them by its kindly influence. It is preaching Jesus Christ to give good advice, to make appropriately a saving remark, to give to one deserved praise, to another a kind reproof. It is preaching Jesus Christ to clasp the hand of a woman in discouragement, to bestow a tender and pitying glance on a weak creature who claims our interest. It is preaching Jesus Christ to show to

others, by word and conduct, that one does not belong to one's self but entirely to others, devoted to their interests, disposed to render them service. Finally, it is preaching Jesus Christ to go into the world to teach others to live in it as though they were not in it, to teach them not to attach themselves to it, not to love it, but to consider, as a painful necessity, the obligation of maintaining its various relations.

But, in order that this preaching may bear its fruit, it must be done with a pure intention and with no pretension; for pretension, disagreeable as it is in a man, is intolerable in a woman. This preaching must be so natural that it must be done unperceived, not only by those to whom it is addressed, but also by the one from whom it comes. This unconsciousness of what she is doing does not, and should not, prevent her before acting from proposing to herself a grave and lofty aim. After having carefully directed her intention, she should think only of being agreeable to those with whom she is, without any endeavor to preach. Otherwise her conversation would be unnatural and inappropriate; her intention would be perceived by others as soon as by herself, and would not attain its object; for no one is willing to be preached to in a drawing-room, especially by a woman, of whom one asks in

general only that she should be agreeable and kind.

A woman who, for the purpose of being useful, wishes to maintain her position, should carefully guard against offending by affected or haughty manners, by dry and monotonous conversation, or by sententious and emphatic language. She should not take an active part in any discussion. But, similar to an arbiter or a judge, she should rule all, and interpose only to direct or to pacify. She should not display her knowledge and learning if she has any, but should rather try to conceal it from others, and if the thing be possible, conceal it from herself.

She should rarely contradict in a formal and positive manner the propositions advanced by others, but rather question by way of doubt, and she should seem to wish to inform herself rather than to correct others. A woman should never act outside of her nature, and she is never so sure of obtaining what she desires as when she is not exacting and seems even not to desire to have her wish fulfilled. She should not allow herself any personalities, any offensive bantering, but sparing each one's susceptibilities, having an eye to everything, she should instinctively take sides with the one who is attacked and make defence all the easier for him by offering

her support. These are some of the services that will win the heart and confidence of others, and will render the good she intends easier of attainment.

If she is acquainted with a few women whom she can associate in her work and admit into her apostleship, let her be of this mind that two are ever stronger than one, and that there is strength in union. If women, having the same sentiments and ideas, understood one another well, and knew how to combine their efforts, their successes would be at the same time more prompt and sure. Having on their part the power that truth and right give, they might, by going to work the proper way, reform the tone and customs of society in a city, or at least oppose to what is bad and pernicious a saving counterpoise. Besides, a protest, even when it seems without result, is never lost, though it merely serve as a bar against that indifference to evil and its abuses, which is undoubtedly the worst of all evils, since it seems to invest wrong with the right to exist as by force of law.

VI

ON A RELIGIOUS LIFE

WHEN a woman wishes to choose the calling wherein she is to serve God, two ways are open to her, both good and direct, both leading to the same goal, although one leads there in a surer manner, and, perhaps, on that account, is more perfect than the other. Virginity and maternity, which were united in Mary by a miraculous operation of God, can never again be thus united in other women; and each one of them must choose one or the other of these two states, according to the greater attraction she feels for the one or the other. She can be happy and work out her salvation in either, but happiness and salvation will be easier in that one for which God has given her greater dispositions, and consequently greater prepossession.

However, if through negligence or some other motive still more culpable, she has not corresponded to the call of Providence, if she has chosen a state less conformable to her tastes, let

her not be discouraged on that account; for, with a little resignation and courage, there is no condition wherein happiness may not be possible; and with great docility to grace, there is none wherein salvation may not be easy. God has not so specially determined and assigned to a given state the graces He reserves to each one of us that, outside of it, we should find nothing but occasions of sin and no aids to help us avoid them.

The first and most perfect of states that a woman can embrace is that of virginity, or a religious life; and when she feels called to it by God, she should be supremely grateful, and be very careful not to lose this precious and alluring grace through any fault of hers. Parents are very guilty when, loving themselves more than they do their children, they refuse to sacrifice their tastes to God; and they run the risk of rendering their children unhappy for the remainder of their lives by obliging them to embrace a calling for which they feel no desire.

People in the world generally have a false idea of religious communities and the life that is led in them. They think that a woman who consecrates herself to God in a cloister cannot be happy, and that she is condemned, sooner or later, to repent the resolution that made her

enter therein. There is no question but that there are in the cloister regrets and vain desires, that there are souls for whom the religious life must be a continual struggle. But are there no such regrets and griefs in marriage? And if the number of women regretting the world in the cloister had to be compared with the number of those in marriage that would willingly change their condition for that of the cloister, I do not know which side would have the advantage. If one had to compare what a woman who regrets the world suffers in the cloister with what a married woman suffers who has made an unfortunate marriage, I do not know which condition would be preferable. What I do know is that in countries where divorce is legal, it is very frequent, notwithstanding the odium that public opinion still attaches to it; and that in countries where the law prohibits it, the courts resound daily with scandalous lawsuits that call before the judges ill-assorted couples, whose separation must be declared in order to avoid greater evils.

Now the law allows of an appeal in the case of the spouses of Christ; and those who are unhappy have only one word to say to change the condition which has become intolerable. Why do they not say it? Why do they not brave public opinion, as do every day the women who

come into the courts and make a display of their misfortunes and even of the faults that originate with marriage? There is a certain degree in misfortune wherein woman no longer listens to any consideration, and allows herself to be stopped by no obstacle; and when she regrets or desires a thing ardently, who does not know that her desire gives to her will an energy of which man would be incapable? If regrets were as numerous and keen in the cloister as is supposed, we should often see those who are unhappy there, claim the right that the law grants them. Those who have not made any perpetual vows, and who can, therefore, abandon their calling without betraying their consciences, can take advantage of the right they reserved to themselves. Yet it is seldom they do this; nay, for the most part, all die as they have lived, spouses of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the Church has taken all the necessary precautions to prevent these regrets, by the institution of the novitiate which always precedes the religious profession, and wherein those who prepare themselves for it can, during several years, try the religious life and its duties, and judge if it suits them.

But the strangest reproach that men of the world urge against the religious life is that this

life, according to their view, misunderstands woman's dignity and reduces her, through the vow of obedience, to the rôle of a slave. In fact, to hear them, one would say that woman's position in the world leaves nothing to be desired and offers a vast field to her activity. What condition, pray, have the laws made for woman in marriage? Legislation considers and treats her as a minor, and places her under the tutelage of her husband without whom she can scarcely do anything. There are many circumstances in which she is not allowed even the right of giving her testimony about a fact, and this right is the simplest that can be granted to man, since its use supposes only sound senses and an honest conscience.

Now, all those rights that the law withholds from woman in the world, the Church grants in the cloister. It is true, woman must obey; but she obeys a rule that she knows, that she has accepted and tried, and that cannot be changed without her being consulted. It is true she has superiors in whose hands she has placed her will; but she herself chooses these superiors; she can almost always change them after a time short enough to render tyranny impossible.

In these cloisters that people calumniate, you find again public and social life, which in the

world is the exclusive privilege of the men. You find deliberative assemblies, women who give their advice and their vote, who administer the property of the community and make use of it as appears most suitable to them. She who obeys to-day will, perhaps, command to-morrow, and she who commands will resume, among those who obey, the place she formerly occupied and from which she was taken at the will of her companions. Can command be tyrannical or can obedience be humiliating with such forms of government, with such precautions?

But it is not the thought of enjoying these advantages that should determine a woman in her choice of the religious life. She should carry her views higher, and propose to herself, before all, the glory of God, the salvation of her soul, and the good of others. She should, before taking a resolution affecting her whole life, consider carefully the nature and extent of the obligations she will impose on herself; she should study her disposition and inclinations, in order to see clearly whether she is attracted toward a more perfect life by the sole desire of pleasing God and corresponding to His call, or whether she is not drawn to it unawares by some natural motive, hidden in the recesses of her soul and discernible only upon scrupulous inquiry.

Sometimes, also, women of lively imaginations and warm hearts, putting too great confidence in a period of temporary fervor excited in their souls by some solemn occasion, consider the longings for perfection that they feel, a call to the religious life, and imprudently take resolutions that embarrass in a serious manner their whole future, and sow the seed of innumerable sorrows. It is not usually by sudden and violent desires that the voice of God is manifested in our souls. The aim of life and the secret of our future are not revealed suddenly to our minds. The action of God and of His grace is nearly always gentle, slow, and almost imperceptible, springing like a germ, then developing and growing constantly. It is, moreover, favored by the exterior circumstances which God arranges and harmonizes with His designs. Sometimes, however, to try our will, He causes obstacles to arise in our way, and obliges us to display against them the energy His grace gives us.

A woman should not decide alone in an affair of such importance, in which she can so easily be deceived in her dispositions and the nature of the motives directing her. If she has the happiness of possessing Christian parents, she should open her heart to them with the greatest confidence and should value the counsels she

receives from them. If her parents are old, if they need her presence and care, God would have to call in a very striking manner to induce her to abandon them at such a time; for, in that case, she has before her a sure and present duty which can be counterbalanced only by another equally sure. She should, therefore, prefer her tastes to the will of her parents only when the latter are guided in their opposition by motives manifestly bad, or of such an inferior order that they can have no weight with a generous soul.

After her parents, a woman should also consult wise, prudent, and enlightened persons fully acquainted with the religious life and capable of appreciating its duties and difficulties. In order to help them form their opinion more easily and more safely, she should make herself known to them just as she knows herself, in order that they may judge whether her dispositions and nature are in accord with the duties of the life she wishes to embrace. She should especially consult herself, study her mind and heart, her disposition and will, and review her past life, the habits of which may often weigh in her decision. Let her forecast the future, and not deceive herself on the difficulties that may arise later, and the regrets that may spring from them. For the religious life does not exempt one from that

combat and warfare to which man has been condemned since the fall. It has its temptations, its dangers, its sadness, like all states, — even the happiest on earth.

If she has a fickle and frivolous disposition; a weak and sluggish will; an unsteady heart, overgiven to sentiment; if she passes quickly from fervor to a tepid or unsettled life; if her harsh and intractable will can endure only with difficulty the yoke of obedience; if she is inclined to envy, consumed with the desire to rule; if she has a restive, headstrong, and factious spirit; if her heart needs a sensible object to engage its affections and fix its desires, let her beware, on entering a cloister, of finding, instead of the security she is seeking, temptations more numerous and formidable than those in the world.

But if she has a strong and constant will; if she is capable of long devotion and great sacrifices; if she is humble, obedient, of gentle and even temperament; if she likes prayer, recollection, and solitude; if the world and its pleasures have no attraction for her; if her heart has not that sensibility, I might call exterior, which can be satisfied only by sensible affections; if the love of God and the contemplation of His infinite perfections can suffice her soul, — then she may

hope that the inclination she feels for the religious life is inspired by grace; and there remains nothing more for her but to discover to which kind of calling she should consecrate herself: for the religious life is as varied in its objects and in its means as are the needs it must satisfy, the temperaments and tastes to which it must respond.

The woman who, like Martha, is fond of an active life, can find a place to employ her zeal in those admirable societies devoted to the education of children and youth, or to the relief of all infirmities. If, similar to Mary, she prefers to remain at the feet of Jesus in contemplation and prayer, or, if the dispositions of her heart render necessary for her an absolute separation from the world and complete solitude, she can go and immure herself in one of those houses wherein the prayers of a few holy souls offset the blasphemies and crimes which every moment provoke the wrath of the Almighty. She has, like Mary, chosen the better part; and if she be faithful, that part shall not be taken from her, and she shall continue in heaven the life of prayer and love commenced on earth.

VII

ON MATRIMONY

THE religious life, being a life of perfection, is the lot of a small number of privileged souls for whom God reserves His most intimate communications and most precious favors. The majority of women are called to live in the world and to serve God in the married state. Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians, tells them that Christ is the head of man, that man is the head of woman, and that God is the head of Christ; that man has not sprung from woman, but that woman has sprung from man; in other words, that man was not created for woman, but that woman was created for man, and that, whereas man is the image and glory of God, woman, in a special way, is the glory of man.

Does the Apostle mean that man is the end of woman, as God is the end of man? Evidently not. Man and woman have the same end. Both were created for God, and must tend to him,

although by different ways, because of the difference in their natures.

These words of Saint Paul reveal to us a profound knowledge of woman's nature, and of the end assigned her by the very essence of her nature. She is the glory of man, and she was created for him. Man is the image and glory of God, and he has for direct head Jesus Christ, His divine Son.

In fact, what distinguishes woman from man is that the latter can cling to an idea, consecrate, and devote his life to it, while woman cleaves principally to a person. This difference arises from the fact that man was created to act while woman was destined especially to love, and by her love to render action easier to man whose companion she is, and whose glory she should be, according to the expression of the Apostle. Woman, therefore, needs some one on whom to lean, some one to guide her, to be her head, as Christ is the head of man ; some one whose glory she may be, as man is the glory of God. And this necessity, by corresponding to the need of acting and guiding by which man is distinguished from woman, makes for both of them their union in marriage so sweet and profitable. Woman depends on man, man supports woman, and both, lending mutual aid, advance thus more surely toward the common end that calls them.

But this disposition of woman to obey, to lean on some one who will direct her and lend her his strength, to devote herself to a man who will love and sustain her, imposes on her the obligation of examining carefully the character of one to whom she thus intrusts her whole life. For if the man she accepts as husband can really understand the obligations this confidence imposes on him, it is certain she will find in her love for him a sure warrant of happiness and virtue. But if she falls into the hands of a man who misunderstands her dignity, and for whom matrimony is only a veil behind which he can screen the evil passions of his heart, she may well fear that her docility, her disposition to obey, and her desire for affection may turn to her ruin, and that she may end by surrendering to the baleful influence he is trying to exert.

Marriage consists especially in the union of souls. This union alone can satisfy, and no other can take its place. But, in order that souls may be united, they must have a common ground of meeting and of understanding. Love would be sufficient, perhaps, to offer them this plane of union if man had not, beside the need of loving, the need, also, of thinking and believing; and if above the heart he had not a faculty still more exacting, — the intellect.

How can a perfect union be supposed possible between two souls that disagree on the most important points and the essential aim of life; between two souls, the one blaspheming what the other believes and despising what the other most highly esteems?

They will be able to understand each other, it is true, and agree on secondary or indifferent matters; as on what means to use for acquiring a brilliant fortune, for procuring all the comfort that can be desired in this world, for distinguishing themselves from others by luxury and magnificence. In a word, in order to be in sympathy and to understand each other, they must descend to that lower sphere of life in which commoner souls exist, and above which we must rise and maintain ourselves, if we wish to be faithful to our nobler nature and attain our end.

Never shall they be able to rest together on a holy thought, on a heavenly hope, on a divine sentiment. They must, especially, avoid plunging their gaze beyond the narrow horizon of this life; for all their hopes are on this earth. After death, no more union for them, but an eternal separation. The grave shall make an impassable gulf between them. Each "will go into the house of his eternity," and that house shall not be the same. That is the lot, that is the sorrow

and the anguish that women lay up for themselves when, through impulse or through culpable docility to the unjust will of their parents or through some other motive, they take unbelieving men for husbands.

And when it becomes necessary to give their children the education their position demands, to what understanding will the husband and the wife come, since they disagree on the very principle and aim of education? Now, since the government of the family belongs to the man, it will always be his will that prevails. Is it not then probable that, in the education of his children, he will consider as of little consequence religious principles, which should, on the contrary, constitute the essential foundation of education? And will not this negligence have sad results for the happiness and salvation of the children that God will have given him?

Then, when the time comes for the latter to choose a state of life, if God calls them to a more perfect life, will not this vocation be opposed by the prejudices of a father who counts religion for naught, and who cannot understand the peace and happiness that proceed even here below from the sacrifices it inspires? And even though God should call them to the married state, is not the choice of a husband of utmost

importance for happiness and salvation, and should not religion have a large share in the motives that determine this choice?

A woman, by marrying an unbelieving husband, imperils, therefore, not only her own happiness and salvation, but also that of the children God may give her, who may one day be the principal objects of her tenderness and solicitude. It may be that the peace of her last moments will be disturbed by the dreadful fear that when she goes, she leaves her husband and children with no surety for their salvation, and that the farewell she bids them may be an everlasting farewell.

She would not like to marry a man whose rank or fortune would be much inferior to hers, because by doing so she would think she was contracting a marriage beneath her. But there is no true misalliance except between souls; and every soul ennobled by Divine Grace and enriched with its precious gifts that unites itself to a soul deprived of faith and the virtues springing from it, does contract a misalliance, and of all misalliances this is the most real and most deplorable in its results.

It may happen, I know, that a woman by her companionship wins over a husband who does not believe in the Word of life, or that an infidel husband is sanctified by a believing wife; but it

is quite as probable for the opposite to happen; namely, for the husband by his ascendancy to win over and turn aside from the paths of virtue a wife already believing in the Word of life, and for a faithful wife to be perverted by an infidel husband. The words of the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul are addressed to the women who, already married, are obliged to make the best of the sad positions in which they are placed, and not to those who, being yet unmarried, can choose a husband who will give them good assurance of happiness and salvation.

There are circumstances, I know also, in which a woman may reasonably entertain the hope of bringing back to God, by the influence of her counsels and example, a husband whom she loves and by whom she is loved; but this exception only confirms the general rule established above, which women should always have before their minds when there is question of the choice of a husband.

If they are so often obliged to regret later on the decision and choice they have made, it is because before making it they neglected the precautions required by prudence and faith. Did they deliberate gravely before God in meditation and prayer on the part they were about to take? Did they rise by faith above the prejudices and

the illusions that are the inevitable results of the enticement of the heart or of the imagination? Did they place themselves in that impartiality which is nothing but the rectitude and sincerity of the mind, without which there is no security for the judgment or the resolutions proceeding from it? Did they consult God, their parents, persons enlightened and prudent, with a most sincere intention of profiting by their counsels and making them enter as motives into their deliberations? That is what all women should do before choosing a husband. Is that what the majority of them do?

Mothers are persuaded, and persuade their daughters, that a woman, not being able to seek a husband directly, should accept the first one who offers himself, even though he does not present all the qualifications desirable, and that, by acting otherwise, she incurs the risk of not finding any suitable partner later on. But is there not always time to make a decision that compromises happiness and salvation? Why, moreover, do not parents and women whom God calls to live in marriage, rank faith and Christian virtues in a husband on the same footing with those purely external qualities, which they esteem so highly? Let a man poor, but rich in piety and generous feelings, come and offer his heart to a

woman, and you will see what obstacles such a union will meet either on the woman's part or on that of the parents.

Now, whatever confidence a daughter may have in her parents, whatever respect she may have for their wishes, her duties toward them cannot go so far as to make her forget her obligations toward God; and her obedience to their orders cannot go so far as to make her compromise her salvation and happiness. In circumstances as important as those under consideration she should have enough courage and firmness to oppose an invincible resistance to all the solicitations that can be made, when her submission would be likely to lead to sad mistakes and useless regrets in the future. She should act thus not only for herself, but also to spare her parents, whom she loves, the dreadful grief of having caused their daughter's unhappiness by forcing her into a union contrary to conscience and her tastes.

VIII

ON ILL-ASSORTED MARRIAGES

WHAT should a woman do who has, through error or through her own fault, made a poor marriage, and who sees herself condemned to spend her whole life with a man whom, perhaps, she can neither respect nor esteem? Is her misfortune without remedy, and is there nothing left her but discouragement and despair? Her condition is sad, I admit, and I do not know whether there be one more wretched on earth. But, after all, there is no position so difficult that a firm and courageous will may not triumph over it; and when a misfortune is inevitable, is it not escaping it in part to accept it with resignation and patiently to suffer its tortures? If in a life sown with griefs and miseries, as ours is, patience is half our virtue and the most abundant source of our merits, of what value in God's eyes and of what price for eternity, is not a life of renunciation and continual sacrifice?

On Ill-Assorted Marriages

It is very true that woman's first need is to love and be loved; but it is none the less true, and men too often forget it, that woman has a far loftier idea of love than they generally suppose. Love in her eyes is a union of tenderness, esteem, confidence, respect, and even admiration; for it is seldom she loves without at the same time admiring in her way the person whom she loves. Naturally compassionate toward physical infirmities which often increase her love by giving the opportunity, so precious to her, of exercising her devotion, she is without pity for infirmities either of mind or heart; pity in this sphere is only contempt. Only a very small number of women, either by great superiority of soul, or by a wonderful power over their hearts, or by force of virtue, know how to rise above this condition of their nature. Even the weaknesses they have shared or incited find them pitiless when they denote any considerable vice of mind or heart.

As soon as the enticement has passed, they avenge themselves on you for the faults they have made you commit, or for those to which they have stooped. For woman needs to believe that man is stronger than she, that he is able to uphold and even to withhold her, if need be. This conviction is necessary in order that she may

respect and have regard for her husband. Woe, then, to the man imprudent enough to deprive her of it; for the woman who ceases to respect her husband is very near loving him no more: and when her heart is void of love, many tempests may rage within it.

It is a terrible moment for a woman when, after having given her husband all the treasures of her soul, she is obliged to see that she has adored only an idol and to say to herself these sad words: I was mistaken! It is then she should call to her aid her faith and all the kindly thoughts it can suggest; for faith alone can give her the necessary strength to bear her unhappiness, and to escape the dangers of which it may be the source.

The greatest of all these dangers is to let them be surmised by revealing, either through indiscretion or lack of vigilance, the situation whence they originate. For so she would expose herself to the flattery and homage of those corrupt men who spy with wicked curiosity the tears and groans that unhappiness wrings from women, and who offer them, as compensation for the happiness they have lost, crime, shame, and remorse. The slightest indiscretion may lead to fatal results. If she feels strong enough to be sufficient unto herself in this sad situation, if

she can find in her mind light enough for guidance and energy enough in her will to follow this light, I should advise her to speak of her sorrows and anguish only to God — to God alone.

But if she is obliged to ask of others the light and strength she lacks, let her be very discreet in the choice of her confidantes and in the revelation of the secrets intrusted to them. The persons that seem to be the natural depositaries of her confidence are not always those whom she should choose in these critical circumstances. A mother, a sister, a friend is not always a safe advisor in matters of such importance. Blinded by her affection or influenced by her indignation, a mother or a sister might, perhaps, further increase the evil, by advising imprudent or hasty measures. In order to be trusted one must have a reasonable, firm, and discreet mind, a sound judgment, a reserved, calm, and reflective nature, an impartial and enlightened tenderness, a great experience of life and of the human heart, a tried discretion, and an upright will.

A woman well directed may yet derive profit from her grievous position and may lessen its difficulties and sufferings. Let her, first of all, try to overcome her repugnance and contempt;

for contempt is not a Christian sentiment, and can never become the motive power of a good action. Then let her endeavor, by diligent care, constant attention, and unremitting devotion, to bring back her husband to better feelings and to elevate him somewhat in her own eyes. Let her substitute charity for the natural love she has lost. "Charity is strong as death and enduring as hell." Perhaps she will triumph in this way over the obstacles that have resisted the most tender love. Perhaps God waits to crown her efforts until she has given them a loftier motive, and placed them under the influence of His grace.

Let her never indulge in any reproach, any complaint; let her suffer with unalterable patience the ill treatment or harsh words of a husband blinded by anger and carried away by passion; let her, according to the word of God, "overcome evil with good."

Let her yield, let her even offer every sacrifice but that of conscience and the duties prescribed by it — for her condescension on this point would be sinful, and far from producing the desired effect, would only give her husband new weapons against her, by weakening the respect she had inspired in him. In order to please him, let her not fear to omit certain unnecessary, devotional practices, or to ask dispensation from such as are

enjoined by the Church, but not enforced under these circumstances.

In a word, let her do everything to avoid an outbreak, which is always disagreeable and often an occasion of scandal. A separation can be advised, as a rule, only when the salvation and honor of a woman are no longer safe under the roof that shelters her husband, or when the excess of the evil has become so intolerable that the woman's patience can no longer suffice; or, finally, when the future of the children imperatively demands it. Even in that case one must avoid publicity as much as possible, and prefer a voluntary separation, if circumstances allow, to a legal separation which displays to the eyes of the world the often scandalous details of a corrupt and criminal life.

But let not the woman who has been obliged to resort to this cruel extremity and the one who still suffers in secret the tortures of an ill-assorted union, let them not forget that the world should be dead to them; that they will often find snares in its pleasures and occasions of sin in its festivities; that their void and famished hearts will eagerly cast themselves, perhaps, on the first object presenting itself. To a woman whose husband has failed to make himself esteemed, the majority of men are pleasing

and dangerous, and she can escape the perils that threaten her innocence only by considering herself a widow and, like a widow, living in complete retirement from the world, its festivities and pleasures.

IX

ON ILL-ASSORTED MARRIAGES
(*continued*)

IF the condition of women condemned to useless regrets by an ill-assorted marriage deserve all our commiseration, we have only words of severity for those who believe themselves unhappy because they think they are not understood, and who make their husbands responsible for all the wretchedness and *ennui* proceeding from their own whimsical imaginations. The weak and artificial education that the majority of women receive at home and in boarding-schools, predisposes them, in an uncommon degree, to this kind of malady, which has its source in a constitution weakened by excessive care and in a nature enfeebled by indulgence.

The reading of novels, the frequenting of theatres, the dissipation and love of the world, foster and increase moreover this disposition, which in marriage can only be corrected by great firmness and unalterable patience on the husband's part. But, on the contrary, the latter

almost always only excites its development either by a fatal condescension to the whims of his wife, or by his own caprices and impatience. Mothers do not know what miseries they lay up for the future of their daughters when they weaken the natural tone of their dispositions by too fastidious an education and yielding tenderness; and when, through inaction, they destroy all the elasticity of that powerful spring of the soul which produces all its movements, — the human will.

These women, satiated with life almost before they have tasted it, are a scourge to their husbands, their families and themselves. Given up to unendurable *ennui*, they are always and everywhere seeking pleasure as a diversion. When they find some flower or joy in their path, they do not know how to preserve it and ensure its long existence through wise moderation; but intoxicating themselves with its perfume, in one breath they exhaust all its fragrance, and there remains in their hands nothing but a faded flower, without sweetness or savor, and in their hearts only a deeper void to fill, keener desires to satisfy. It is thus that marriage, after interrupting for a time the monotony of their wearied existence, becomes, like all the rest, dull and tiresome. This sad return is all the more prompt, because they tasted with more eagerness

the joys that spring from marriage. They seek in it pleasure and change; as soon as they catch a glimpse of its duties, the charm is broken, and they carry elsewhere their desires and hopes of happiness.

Having allowed their wills to decay by lack of exercise, they are, in a way, deprived of the faculty of willing. All the energy of their souls is concentrated in the faculty of feeling and receiving the impressions that come from all sides to their eager and inquisitive imaginations. Now, this faculty of feeling, so precious when counterbalanced and restrained within just limits by a strong and powerful will, becomes fatal when it has acquired such predominance that nothing in the soul will any longer balance it; and this is the lot reserved to women who have early abused this faculty. Their souls resemble harps which, suspended to a tree, resound under the light touches of the breeze; they are shaken and put in motion by every impression received from surrounding objects; inert and passive instruments, they return every sound which these impressions communicate to them.

To this predominance of sensibility in their souls, there responds in their bodies an excessive development of the nervous system and a manifest weakness of the muscular system which ought

to serve as its counterpoise. Their nerves are like chains that attract the electric fluid and conduct it to the bowels of the earth. They incite the attack of those numberless passions that invade the soul through the senses, and they conduct its burning spark to the very depths of their souls, which develop, sickly and languishing, in debilitated and suffering bodies.

From such women as these ask neither discipline of mind, nor perseverance of will, nor energy of character, nor devotion of heart. They love and seek themselves alone, and refer everything to themselves. It is they, themselves, whom they love in their husbands and children; and if these refuse to be docile instruments of their caprices, they immediately become indifferent toward them. Slaves to vanity, self-love, and pleasure, they wish to be flattered and praised, to be pitied, to be thought ill and suffering, to be admired for their courage, to be thanked, as for sacrifices, for all the trouble they have given themselves to please and to vary the monotony of their long days.

In their shameful egotism they have no other aim but their pleasures or interests, neither can they have any other motive for their reasons, nor any other rule for their appreciation of men and things. Therefore the meaning of words is, in

some way, changed for them. Good is what pleases them; it is even, perhaps, what flatters the bad passions of their hearts. Evil is what displeases or annoys them. Estimable and distinguished men are those who flatter and deceive them; those who have deference for each of their vagaries, praise for each of their actions and words; those, especially, who pity them for the sad necessity they are under, of living without being understood in a sphere quite inaccessible to a husband of the more common order of souls.

Their children's education, family cares, household occupations, all these are beneath them and would distract them from that contemplation of themselves that seems to be the sole labor of their lives. Moreover, after the time devoted during the day to the care of their dress, the reading of novels and frivolous stories from which they obtain all their knowledge, the calls and conversations in which they pour into the hearts of those resembling themselves their common griefs, the theatres and festivities, and more than all that, the long tediousness of their empty and withered souls; after all this, can there be any time still left for the more modest but more fruitful occupations to which women who understand the meaning and aim of life willingly devote themselves?

Does there exist a remedy for these maladies of the soul, so common nowadays among women? and, if it exists, where is it? To the eyes of faith, which knows the power of grace and all the strength it gives to the will, there is no moral disease so deep-seated and so old for which God has not prepared a remedy; but the disease in question, it must be admitted, is one of the gravest and most difficult to cure, because it attacks the very faculty that ought to apply the remedy, and paralyzes its action and force. So long as the will has not yet lost its energy, the evils of the soul can be easily cured. But the worst of all conditions is that in which man seems to have lost, in some way, the faculty of willing. However, he can always recover this faculty, and, on that account, despair is a crime for him; because he is not alone, and what he could never do by himself becomes easy as soon as he prays God to do it with him.

A husband can, in a great measure, aid his wife in her courageous resolution to reform her nature, vitiated by a bad education; but to do this he must devote himself entirely to this task, worthy, after all, of the efforts and time given to it. If he has both patience enough to endure without murmuring all his wife's caprices and enough firmness never to condescend to them;

if to an inflexible, but always calm and impassive, will he can add unvarying kindness; if, by always firm and wise management he can give to his wife and preserve in her, a high opinion of his judgment and character; if she cannot doubt his affection, his devotion, he will be able to obtain from her resolutions and sacrifices of which, perhaps, she would be incapable without him.

This kind of disease, having its seat both in the body and in the soul, requires a *régime* at once bodily and moral. The nervous system, shattered by continual excitement, must be restored; those relaxed cords, that have lost their elasticity and that move only by starts, must be wound up again, and their excessive agitation must be brought back to regular and harmonious movements. It is the business of the physician, who will advise a sober and strengthening regimen, and will carefully forbid all that might increase or arouse the nervous excitement, which must be lessened and calmed.

But the will also, weakened by long inaction, must be repaired, and this reparation requires the continued use of the natural and the supernatural means that reason and grace place at our disposal. It is the affair of the husband, of a firm, prudent, and enlightened director, of a

woman friend at once devoted and experienced; it is, especially, the affair of God and of the diseased will.

Prayer, meditation, frequent use of the sacraments, practice of good works: such are the remedies that Grace provides, and that an enlightened director will advise. To accustom oneself little by little to will, by willing at first easy things and then passing to others more difficult, in order, finally, to go even to the great resolutions and sacrifices that cost the most; to do disagreeable things when they are useful, in preference to those which, with the same degree of usefulness, would be agreeable; to train one's mind to examine the useful rather than the flattering side of things; to deny oneself every pleasure, every reading, every drama that might, by arousing the sensibilities, disturb this salutary system, whose aim is to weaken the emotions; to watch with particular care over the imagination and close it to every object that might unduly excite it: such are the natural means that reason points out to us, and the continued use of these can produce the happiest results.

With patience, courage, and firmness the will, gradually, will resume the rank belonging to it among the faculties of the soul; peace and happiness will flourish again in the family; husband

and wife, whose ill-assorted union seemed likely to cause unhappiness, will reap with joy the fruit of their common efforts, and will feel their lives reinvigorated with a new bloom of tenderness and love.

X

ON PIETY

"PIETY is profitable to everything: it has promises for the present life and for the future." These words of the Apostle express wonderfully the nature of piety and the advantages it procures. It is not destined solely to assure us happiness in the other life, but it has, besides, for object to make us find in this valley of tears the peace and degree of happiness we are able to enjoy. It is especially important that women be fully penetrated with this truth; for it is their duty to make virtue amiable by adorning it with the graces of their minds and hearts, and to make man, who does not yet know the promises it embraces for the present life, dispose himself the more to seek for their enjoyment in the future.

Unfortunately, many women consider piety only in its relation to eternity, and shutting themselves up in a sort of egotism which they do not even suspect, they think of securing in the other life

the happiness to which they aspire, without a thought of having it shared by those around them. Deceived by exaggerated and false maxims, they go sometimes even so far as to persuade themselves that a pious woman should not be amiable, and that she should think much more of exhibiting in her life the sternness of God's law than displaying the sweetness and lightness of His yoke. They thereby render piety intolerable to their husbands and children, and drive them to an opposition which is fatal to their souls' salvation.

Taking for the essence of piety what is only its accessory and, as it were, its scaffolding, they make it consist in a multitude of exterior practices with which they burden their lives, and to which they make no scruple of sacrificing the most important duties of their positions. They think they are lost if they fail in their daily habit of going to mass, or of reciting such a prayer; and they think themselves perfectly innocent of the pernicious results often caused by their lack of vigilance or their absence from the house; innocent of the complaints, murmurs, and blasphemies, it may be, of a husband or a son who dares make his accusations ascend even to God, when they should have stopped with man, and who make God responsible for the defects and

faults which His love would prevent, if it were well understood by those who serve Him.

The Lord Himself warns us that it is not He who says: Lord, Lord, who shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven but he who does the will of the Heavenly Father. And He tells us, moreover, that the observance of His commandments is the sign by which we shall know if we love Him. Now what God wills first is that we should fulfil with exactness all the duties of our state. Our direct obligations toward Him are not very numerous, and can be referred to the precept He has given us to love Him more than all else, and to act in all things for His glory. But the obligations toward our brethren and those arising from our positions, press on us every moment of our lives. It is on this account that many think it much more convenient to free themselves from the latter duties under the vain pretext of living solely for God.

But it is interpreting His will badly, or rather it is preferring one's own will to neglect the things He demands of us in order to do those He does not. A woman who has chosen the married life must bear both its inconveniences and its obligations; she must seek to please not only God but her husband besides, and must be resigned to divide her life between God and him.

Does this mean that the mother of a family can, and ought to, take away from God a part of her affections and heart, that she can in her actions propose to herself another end than that of pleasing God, and that God consents in her case to share with her husband the supreme dominion that He has over all the faculties of our souls, and all the acts produced by these faculties? Far from us be such a thought. In whatever position we may be, we must do everything for the glory of God, and never have any other final aim than that of pleasing Him.

But there is between the life of a married woman and that of a virgin this difference, that for the latter the end and means are in some way confounded, while for the former the means are perfectly distinct from the end, and can be referred to it only by an intention of the will.

The division of which Saint Paul speaks is, therefore, not in the end, which is the same for each and every one of us, but in the means and duties. Virgins have but one duty and one thought, which is to please God; wives have many, for in order to please God, they must try to please their husbands and to lead toward God the family intrusted to them.

They must fully understand that piety consists in the devotion or the consecration of every

faculty of the soul and every moment of one's life to God, through His Son, Jesus Christ; that piety is an interior sentiment which Grace puts in the depths of our souls, becoming in us the principle of a new life, animating and producing every movement of our hearts and wills, and directing them toward God, as toward the sole and supreme end. They must understand that it is precisely in this direction of the will and all its acts, that the essence of prayer consists; that prayer, as usually understood, is only a particular form of that general and habitual prayer recommended to us by Jesus Christ, when He tells us to pray without ceasing; that to pray is to think of God, to lift one's mind and heart to Him, to act for His glory, to know how to give up the pleasure our souls would enjoy in entertaining themselves with Him in prayer, in order to please Him and accomplish the duties He imposes on us. But to pray when one should act, to be at church when one should be at home, to remain at the feet of Jesus in contemplation, like Mary, when one should, like Martha, carry one's solicitude to many things, is not praying to God, it is praying to oneself; it is not pleasing God and doing His will, but it is doing one's own. To be pious is not to be always doing what others do not do, and omitting

what they do ; it is, especially, doing it otherwise than they, — doing it for God, while they do it for themselves.

When the Holy Spirit wishes to offer a model to all women destined to live in marriage, He does not present a woman absorbed in contemplation and prayer, but an active and vigilant woman, seeking wool and flax to occupy her hands usefully, bringing from afar the bread necessary for her family, rising before day to distribute food to her servants, considering the fields that surround her domain and buying them, planting vineyards, girding her loins with strength and strengthening her arms with work, putting her hand to strong things and knowing how to handle the spindle, opening her hands to the needy, protecting all her servants from the cold with strong garments, making herself those that are to cover her, and not eating her bread in idleness. Behold the woman whose value the Holy Spirit declares inappreciable. (Proverbs, xxxi.)

Let women not forget especially that one of the most important characteristics of piety is to make us humble in the eyes of God, severe to ourselves, patient and indulgent to others. That it is displeasing God, causing His name to be blasphemed, and compromising piety in the eyes

of the world, to have one's eyes always opened on the defects or actions of others, and to be blind to oneself; to flatter oneself, like the Pharisee, for not having such or such a vice that one observes complacently in one's neighbor; not to be able to endure either contradiction, humiliation, or reproaches; to seek one's comfort everywhere; to seek what pleases and flatters, instead of bearing in one's body and soul the mortification of Christ Jesus; to be always dissatisfied with others and pleased with oneself. For such souls piety is, merely a becoming veil thrown over their egotism and pride, and a sort of profanation of which God will demand a strict account.

This is how Saint Paul represents piety, while depicting charity which is blended with it: "Charity is patient, kind, it is not jealous; it does not act in vain, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth; it suffers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (First Epistle to the Corinthians, xiii.).

Let every woman study well these characteristics and let her compare attentively what she is with what the Apostle wishes her to be.

XI

ON THE LOVE OF THE WORLD AND PLEASURES

WHEN our Lord was on the point of consummating His sacrifice, He wished to leave us the expression of His last will in that admirable discourse addressed to his disciples and transmitted to us by Saint John. Every one of the words composing this sublime allocution borrows another new character of solemnity from the circumstances in which it was delivered. The Saviour of the world was about to leave the earth; the half-opened heaven allowed Him to see some rays of the glory whither were to lead Him the approaching humiliations of His passion and death. With His mind raised to heaven and clinging to earth only by the immense love which caused Him so soon to shed His blood for it, He mingled in harmonious confusion the holy sadness of His exile about to finish and the divine joys of the glorious fatherland He was going to open for us through His death.

Now, what at first sight strikes the thoughtful reader in this discourse is a strong antipathy to the world and everything pertaining thereto. At the very moment when charity overflowed His heart and spread itself over us in bountiful waves, an unconquerable repulsion, an intense hatred, reveals itself and suffers words of wrath and malediction to come to his lips, contrasting strangely with the expressions of love and tenderness with which this discourse is filled. This same Saviour, who on the cross prayed for His executioners and through a feeling of unutterable love, sought to excuse their malice, declares, before ascending Calvary, that He does not pray for the world, but for those His Father has given Him. Whence it is easy to conclude that God has not given Him the world, that the world is excluded from the circle of His influence, withdrawn from the empire of His grace, since it is excluded from His prayer and since the source of grace is in the prayer of the Redeemer.

Moreover, if we could have any doubt of the strict meaning of Jesus Christ in this matter, it is clearly stated in the continuation of this discourse, when He presents the enemy of God and of the human race as the prince of this world, and when He affirms that the Paraclete

will convince the world of sin, and that the world will not receive the Spirit of Truth, and that it will pursue with its hatred all the true faithful, because it will not recognize in them anything belonging to it.

Thus, according to the very words of the Saviour, there are two camps, two armies, two kingdoms opposed to each other, each having its own head, its constitution, its laws, and its aim, forced by their own natures to struggle against each other without ever being able to end this warfare by any strong and lasting peace, without ever being able to calm, for a few moments, by any sincere truce the violence of this mutual enmity. Therefore every one is obliged to choose the kingdom to which he desires to belong, the leader whom he wishes to obey, the standard under which he will fight; for, in order to close every other exit, Jesus Christ declares, elsewhere, that no one can serve two masters.

No compromise is, then, possible between the two powers that dispute the empire of our hearts. The worldling who persuades himself he can become a Christian while remaining attached to the maxims of the world, deludes himself; and the Christian who imagines he can remain a disciple of Jesus Christ while caring for the world, its

pomps and vanities, strangely deceives himself; and his error must, sooner or later, become for him a source of many faults and bitter regrets. Whoever seeks to convince you that you can reconcile the maxims of the world with the principles of the Gospel, the vanities of the world with the humiliations of the cross, the pomp of the world with the simplicity of the Christian life, is a cheat and liar; and if an angel should tell you the contrary, you ought, according to the forcible expression of the Apostle, challenge his testimony, because he would preach another gospel than that of Jesus Christ.

When we hear the Saviour formally declare that He does not pray for the world; and, later, when we see Him praying on the cross for His executioners, we are at first seized with astonishment; we ask ourselves what can be so wicked in the world, and how God can prefer even those who rendered themselves guilty of the greatest of all crimes. But when we reflect on the nature of the world, and consider with some attention the corruption of its maxims and their fatal results, we begin to understand the severity of Jesus Christ in its regard, and the preference He gives to the crimes that the world itself would eminently condemn.

There are, in fact, some faults that presuppose

in the person committing them a certain energy of will, and that take their rise in a great passion and betray undue development or fatal deviation of some faculty of the soul, and, in some way, carry with them their punishment in the shame or remorse that follows and the horror they inspire. They almost immediately draw down the wrath of God, which exhausts itself, so to speak, by striking the guilty one even in this life and sparing him a means of return in the scorn of which he is the object. The guilty one, in fact, seeing himself rejected by the world, and seeing closed around every avenue whither the approaching humiliations were to lead him, is in some way forced to seek in God the shelter and protection refused everywhere else; incapable o retrieving himself in the eyes of men, he tries to regain, at least in his own eyes, the esteem denied him by the pitiless severity of the world.

But there is a numerous class of actions, habits, and inclinations, condemned by Christian morality, toward which the world is supremely indulgent. The heart that surrenders itself to these soon becomes their slave. Not finding anything, either within or without itself, which may warn it of the dangers to which it is exposed, it falls asleep in a false peace, and does not feel the need of having recourse to God to ask for sup-

port and favor which men give to it with eagerness. Friendly with the world which flatters and deceives it, well pleased with itself on account of the illusions it entertains, it accumulates quietly the apparent benefits of vice and those of virtue, and reaches by a gradual incline that degree of corruption and obduracy whence it can be extricated only by a miracle of Divine mercy.

Women are particularly subject to these illusions. Preserved most often from great excesses through the tenderness of their hearts and the salutary barriers opposed by the proprieties of the world in which they live, they are more exposed to those miseries that find favor in the eyes of men, but that, little by little, wear away the strength of the soul, and finally render it insensible to the charms of virtue and incapable of the efforts it requires. They make for themselves virtues and duties outside of those prescribed by the Gospel; they, in some way, make for themselves a natural gospel, wherein each one of their passions finds countenance, a gospel which furnishes a pretext for the strangest desires of their hearts and for the most culpable indulgences of their lives. Having reached that stage, they are lost to God, whose grace they despise; lost to the family, whose modest and serious duties they neglect; lost, finally, to themselves,

because they have let perish in their hearts the good seed that God had placed therein, and that a Christian education had developed.

Hence it is that the world, which already offers so many dangers to a young man, is even much more dangerous for women, because they find in it food for all the little passions that so easily occupy their hearts and condemn their whole lives to wretched desolation. There comes an age when the man whom the world has enslaved with its law knows how to sever the bonds that enchain him, and to seek in higher regions enjoyments for his mind and heart and an occupation for his life. But the woman who early becomes the slave of the world, far from seeing this humiliating slavery grow less with age, sees it, on the contrary, increase every day. The older she grows, the fewer resources she finds in herself, the more she feels the need of the world, of its vain pleasures, and miserable enjoyments; and when she can no longer love it, she still finds means of paying it homage, by making it loved by those younger than herself and initiating them into all the miseries that have become too heavy a burden for her old age.

Very often woman, when still young, endures with impatience the yoke that the world imposes on her. The noble instincts of her nature revolt

against this humiliating slavery, and aspire to loftier regions; but imperative duties, artificial customs, stern necessity, urge her on and triumph over her repugnance. Habit, which plays so important a rôle in man's life, and which nearly always ends by making the most painful things tolerable, very often goes so far as to make a necessity of those very things that cost the most in the beginning. Habit sweetens, little by little, the too bitter things that the world's exigencies offered at first. The mind and the heart, in proportion as they lose their primitive vigor, become more readily accustomed to a mode of life that requires no effort of the noble faculties of the soul, and in which mediocrity inevitably conquers the most distinguished natures.

Curiosity, so natural to woman, finds food in those conversations in which the actions and intentions of one's neighbor are scrutinized with incredulous levity, and in which the one who shows herself the most rash in her suspicions and the most severe in her judgments is always considered as being right. Vanity is entertained in those reunions where the sound qualities of the mind and heart have nothing to do, but where the only means of distinguishing oneself is to display a more insolent luxury and to affect more scornful airs. Coquetry is developed in

those companies where a woman, void within, reveals to the eyes of the curious the graces of her body, heightened by the splendor of a ravishing attire; where one's merit is estimated by the price of one's garments or by the frivolousness of one's manners. Idleness grows in this unoccupied life, where the soul, diffused wholly without, no longer finds time to enter within itself, to rest on a serious thought, or to allow itself to be carried away toward heaven by some sacred hope. Pride is exalted in this apparent regularity of the conduct of worldly women, who shun great excesses, less on account of the moral disorder inherent in them than by reason of the troubles that follow, and who think, moreover, they acquire thereby the right to yield without scruple to all the small passions tolerated or justified by the world. The soul wears away and belittles itself in this trivial and inconsistent life; and when God wishes to pour His grace into it, He finds only a diseased and fainting heart, incapable of any sacrifice or effort; and often He is forced to withdraw forever, or to wait until some great misfortune has given back tone to the shattered will.

XII

ARE YOU OF THE WORLD?

IN order to leave the world, the woman who wishes to provide against its dangers does not need to live in seclusion, nor to withdraw into a cloister. All women are obliged by the duties of the Christian life not to be of the world, but the majority are compelled to live in the world and to save themselves in the midst of the dangers they meet. Our Lord, in the discourse cited above, asks His Father not to withdraw His disciples from the world, but to keep them from evil; and He adds that they are not of the world, as He, also, is not of the world. It follows thence that the duty of those who wish to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ is, not to withdraw from the world, but to keep from evil and not to be of the world, after the example of their Divine Master.

It is, therefore, a different thing to be in the world and to be of the world. One can very well live as a Christian while in the world, but

one can never please God while of the world. It is, therefore, very important for a young woman to know how to distinguish two states so different, one of which is utterly incompatible with the duties of the Christian life while the other can call forth the development of the loveliest virtues by giving opportunity for the most difficult struggles.

The most superficial minds are, generally, disposed to confound the means with the end, and what there is exterior in the duties of Christianity with what constitutes its spirit or essence. This confusion can give rise to many illusions and dangers. A woman might easily convince herself that the only means of not being of the world was not to be in the world, which is false; or, that once out of the world she has nothing more to fear of its dangers, which is not less contrary to truth.

The throne of God in man is the heart: what appears without should be only the reflection of the light within. And it is in this sense that Our Lord says: "The kingdom of God is within you." It is in this sense, also, that we can add: the reign of the world is within us. What we have to do, then, is not to leave the world, but to drive the world from our hearts when it has taken possession of them; for, as solitude and the reign of

God can be carried into the midst of the world, when one is obliged to live in it, so the reign of the world can be carried into the most deserted retreat and the profoundest isolation.

The world, for a young woman, is not precisely the company she frequents, it is not a certain class of men in particular; but it is that body of maxims and practices that is in direct opposition with the maxims of the Gospel and the usages of the Christian life. It is that levity of mind and heart, that idleness of life, which causes one to expend in sheer waste the noblest faculties of the soul and its most generous instincts.

A woman is of the world when, neglecting the interior, which she should adorn unceasingly with virtues and graces, she applies herself exclusively to adorning the exterior, which claims a far less important part of her attentions and life. She is of the world when, laying aside the most important family duties, she prefers the factitious ones arbitrarily imposed by the world on its slaves. She is of the world, when heeding but little the proprieties of her state and the exigencies of her position, she blindly submits to the most capricious laws and unreasonable usages of fashion. She is of the world when, without regard to the limits imposed by her fortune and without respect for the holy poverty of the poor

of Jesus Christ, she affects in her furnishings, in her dress, in the management of her house, a luxury reproved equally by reason and faith.

She is of the world when, despising the salutary sternness of the Gospel, she takes as guide for her conduct the lax and corrupt maxims of the world; when, never considering the future life, she confines to the present one all the thoughts of her mind and affections of her heart. She is of the world when, scorning work that exercises and develops at once the faculties of the soul and the strength of the body, she condemns both to deplorable idleness. She is of the world when, instead of seeking to please God by devoting herself through the habit of sacrifice to the happiness of those around her who have been intrusted to her care, she seeks to please by exterior charms which an artificial education has developed, and goes begging of strangers insincere praises and undeserved esteem.

She is of the world when, instead of inspiring more serious tastes in a husband who is not a good Christian, and instead of preparing him thereby for the fulfilment of the duties of Christianity, she seeks, on the contrary, for the sake of her own vanity and passions, to take advantage of the weak instincts she observes in him. She

is of the world when, instead of devoting herself to the education of her children and inspiring them at an early age with the taste and love of what is good, she fashions them, on the contrary, according to the artificial usages and the dissipated life of the world of which she herself is a slave, imitating thus those barbarous mothers who, in pagan times, used to deliver their children to the fiery arms of a monstrous idol in order to appease the anger of the god it represented. She is of the world when she likes its laws and humiliating slavery; when she seeks, with immoderate zeal, its enjoyments and pleasures; when she approves what it approves and condemns what it condemns, when she judges, thinks, and feels as it does; when she lives its life and receives all its influences, like the plant that draws its sustenance from the soil where it is rooted.

But a woman is in the world without being of the world when, forced by the exigencies of her position to live in the midst of it, she knows how to make a virtue of the necessity to which she must submit; when, obliged to take part in its festivities and amusements, she keeps up the reign of God within her and that spirit of wisdom and Christian moderation which keeps the soul in right limits and prevents it from giving itself up

without discernment to the attraction of pleasure. She is not of the world when she is in the world as if she were not, making use of the world as if she were not; when she considers it, according to the counsel of the Apostle, like a show or a fleeting shadow, which passes rapidly without leaving any trace behind; when she prefers to its pleasures the far sweeter joys of the family or the holy consolations of solitude and prayer; when she can sacrifice its arbitrary laws and factitious rules to the requirements of duty and religion; when she is, first of all, a pious and humble woman, a vigilant and attentive mother, a tender and obedient daughter, a generous and devoted sister, a faithful and sincere friend; when she knows how to carry and preserve, in the midst of festivities whither an imperative necessity leads her, that good odor of Jesus Christ whose perfume gladdens all those around her and gives rise in their hearts to holy thoughts and pious resolutions; when, instead of attracting others through a secret instinct of vanity, to attach them to her train, she thinks only of attracting them to God by inspiring them with the desire and love of virtue, and when she leans toward them through the motive of a sincere and disinterested charity.

Every woman can judge by these character-

istics, of the nature of her relations with the world, and can discern whether she is of the world as are its other slaves, or whether she is in the world only as are the true servants of Jesus Christ.

XIII

ON LUXURY

SAINT PETER says to women in his first Epistle: "Seek not to shine by the curling of the hair, the ornaments of gold and the beauty of garments; but to adorn the hidden man in the heart by the incorruptible purity of a mind full of sweetness and peace, which is a rich and magnificent ornament in the eyes of God." These words of the Holy Spirit are full of divine meaning which might furnish to women matter for long and fruitful meditations, and which, well understood by them, would give to their lives a more serious direction and to all the faculties of their soul a more harmonious development.

Considering women's tastes and the excessive importance they attach to external advantages and to all that can enhance them, it would seem that they take pains to belittle themselves, and that they like the inferior condition made for them by the usages and prejudices of the world. Or

rather, one is obliged to acknowledge that it is less the prejudices of the world than the frivolous habits of their lives that have made this condition, since women who have enough nobility of mind and strength of will to free themselves from these habits assume at once, both in their families and among those that surround them, the place naturally belonging to them by the superiority of their characters.

Every time that the attention and activity of the soul are directed to the exterior man and devote themselves beyond measure to the culture of corporal advantages, "the hidden man in the heart," spoken of by the Holy Ghost, suffers and loses some of its vigor; for the excessive cares of the body singularly narrow the soul and can be excused in a woman who devotes herself to them, only when she proposes for her aim to obey her husband or to please him. But when they have for principle that secret instinct of vanity inherent, as it were, in women's hearts, and for object the desire, unfortunately so common, of attracting attention and deserving the approbation of the world in the midst of which she lives, nothing can excuse them, not only on account of the trivial motive from which they proceed, but also by reason of the great dangers to which they expose her.

On Luxury

It cannot be repeated too often to women, and they themselves cannot recall it too frequently, that the majority of those who go astray owe the beginning of their transgressions and ruin to the love of luxury. They cannot recall too often that the word meaning immoderate care of exterior ornaments is the root of the word that expresses the love and pursuit of the grossest and most shameful pleasures. The good sense of nations wished to indicate thereby that inordinate luxury is, whether for individuals or whether for nations, the most frequent source of lasciviousness; and never has experience so sadly confirmed this truth as in our day and under our eyes.

A book fruitful in information but discouraging through the deplorable facts it reveals, disclosed, a few years ago, the fearful disorders of which luxury is the source for women. The author, M. Parent-Duchâtelet, after having devoted a great part of his life to the study of the morals and habits of the most corrupt class of society, reached this frightful conclusion: that most of the women who furnished material for his sad observations were lost through love of luxury and dress, and were kept in the criminal path in which they were engaged through fear of losing the finery with which they adorned their bodies to

conceal, as it were, the hideousness and depravity of their souls. One cannot help shuddering when one considers that among these miserable creatures, a large number know and understand their fearful situation; and that, in order to extricate them, it would be sufficient to guarantee them the possession of these exterior adornments, to which they attach more value than to the shameful pleasures that procure them. This is what luxury is for women; this is the abyss whither it leads them by a descent often imperceptible, when they yield to it inordinately, and when they neglect to adorn "the hidden man in their hearts by the purity of a mind full of sweetness and peace."

Woman's luxury has for object, less the exterior things that serve for her use than those that serve to adorn her body. It is in dress that it principally consists. Luxury in furnishing comes to her as a secondary matter, and she attaches, generally, but little value to that of the table. In that class of society which is called middle, because it holds a middle place as between high and low, one often sees women impose on themselves every privation at home, in order to be able to appear with more magnificence abroad. It seems that to many women the family circle deserves no consideration or regard; and that

they need take no care to please those with whom they habitually live. Exceedingly negligent in their dress as long as they are at home they find nothing too beautiful or too elegant when they go abroad.

There is still a certain order in the luxury of furnishings, and a sort of proportion between their magnificence and the fortune of their possessors. But for what concerns the luxury of dress, the strangest confusion begins already to prevail among the various classes of society. Each one wishes to rival in ambition and vanity those who are placed above her; and soon one will be unable to distinguish families in comfortable circumstances from those that are wealthy, if the latter do not seek to be remarked by a greater simplicity in their attire. The woman whose small income does not allow her to be driven in a sumptuous equipage, wishes to imitate or even to equal in her garments the luxury of those who can afford a richer toilet, because it is supported by a variety of conditions forming as it were, its necessary adjuncts. But one does not know whether to pity or to blame the unpleasant and ridiculous contrast existing between the dress of a large number of women and all the other conditions of their lives; for it betrays, at once, both a vanity, reprehensible in the eyes of

reason and faith, and a lack of taste, which almost always proceeds from the defects of early education.

Every Christian woman has for mission nowadays to protest, at least by her example, against the luxury that, through the faults and all the habits proceeding from it, corrupts, like an ulcer the very heart of society, and renders useless for so many souls the examples and merits of Jesus Christ. The world protests against the doctrine and life of a God who willed to be born in a manger and die on a cross, and who solemnly reproved riches, not because of any inherent vice, but because of the luxury it leads to and the means it furnishes to man for satisfying all his passions. By the simplicity of their dress, women who have some regard for the salvation of their souls ought, therefore, to protest, in their turn, against this disorder, and oppose a salutary counteraction to these lamentable customs that make nations stoop toward their ruin and souls toward the eternal abyss.

They should be very careful not to sanction these customs by their example, and thereby be a stumbling-block for others. All women are, in some measure, copartners in this matter, for each one tries to justify her excesses by those of others, and seriously thinks herself obliged to

equal in her luxury those whom she equals in station. It is thus that, little by little, a public opinion is formed, contrary to the maxims of the Gospel and the faith of the Church ; it is thus that false standards are established, opposed to those that come from the profession of Christianity and the vows taken in baptism. What are, in fact, the pomps and vanities of the world, which we renounced before we became children of God, if not these habits of luxury and grandeur which we indulge without scruple, and with which we imagine we can follow that God who entered into His glory only through the humiliations of the cross? But it is certain, through faith, that no one will be in harmony with His glory, if he has not at first been chastened by humiliation and opprobrium.

XIV

ON THEATRES AND NOVELS

THERE are, in the moral order, acts and habits the real nature of which appears at first sight, which every unprejudiced mind can suitably appreciate after a few moments' reflection. No serious doubt can arise of the moral value of these acts; and he who indulges in them knows while acting what he must expect from God and his conscience after he has accomplished them. But there are some, on the other hand, the uncertain nature of which can be clearly determined only by the circumstances that modify them, and appreciation of which is, on that account, much more difficult; for those circumstances are often known only to him who experiences them, and are due to his peculiar position, his physical organization, his disposition or habits in life.

Actions of this kind may oftentimes be more dangerous, and have more fatal results for the future, than those which, naturally bad, excite at

first glance the aversion or distrust of upright souls, and leave in the heart the sharp thorn of remorse and the resolution of avoiding them in the future. For the uncertain nature of the former produces, in the manner of appreciating and judging them, a disagreement and variation which may serve as pretext or excuse to those who indulge them; and those who should enlighten the conscience concerning them, restrained by this difference of opinion, fear either to be too severe in condemning them or too lenient in sanctioning them. More often they deem it more useful to expect, from time and the experience of those who consult them, the light that fails or appears still insufficient; but experience sometimes costs dearly to those who tempt it. The habit is formed and makes the remedy that can cure it more difficult, all the more because these actions often appear innocent in the beginning and produce their effect only in the long run after having been often repeated.

These considerations apply especially to novel-reading and frequenting of theatres; and they ought to suffice to induce a young woman to refrain from both, when she can do so without opposing the will or tastes of her husband. Should she get from the theatre or from novels only a false idea of men and things, it would not

be a slight objection nor a small danger. The intellect, in fact, holds the first rank among man's faculties. It is its province to rule all the others; it furnishes motives for actions, and aim and direction to the whole life. A false judgment is almost inevitably the source of a bad or a useless action.

It is, therefore, important to maintain in order the faculty that must direct all the others; for, according to the word of our Lord, if the light that is in us be dark, what shall be the darkness itself? What becomes of the will, that hidden and blind power destined always to follow the intellect which must serve it as guide, if the latter be as blind as the former? Now, the certain result of novel-reading and frequenting of theatres is to weaken the intellect and pervert the judgment. To convince oneself of this truth, it is sufficient to consider honestly what is the constant theme of the novels and dramas that entertain the leisure and feed the curiosity of women of the world.

In general, virtue is presented under forms that, far from enlisting our hearts in its favor, render it, on the contrary, irksome and often ridiculous. Vice is clothed in such agreeable forms and adorned with such attractive colors that it loses in our eyes the true character

constituting it, and appears, at most, only the exaggeration of a good quality, the exuberant growth of a rich and fruitful nature, or the excusable irregularities of an eccentric and original mind. The holiest institutions, the most sacred duties of society and the family, are treated with deplorable levity.

And even when situations are skilfully managed to make virtue triumphant, it is difficult not to be interested in the vice that succumbs, and not to wish it, in the bottom of one's heart, a happier fate. Every time the libertine is placed in presence of a good man he has the advantage over him, either in the charms of his mind or the generosity of his nature or the perfection of his manners; and the most virtuous woman, seeing in him so many qualities and exterior charms, sometimes feels herself waver. Now, it is a great misfortune for a young woman to doubt her resolution. To believe in the possibility of certain faults is almost the beginning of a fault for her; it is a weakening of the spirit, as it were, which may easily be followed by a weakening of the will. She can never take too great precautions for preserving this holy assurance, this steadfast confidence in her virtue, this exquisite sentiment of her own dignity, which are such powerful securities for her innocence and happiness.

The most dangerous books are not always those in which vice constantly appears triumphant over all obstacles, and seems advancing from success to success, while virtue, humbled and oppressed, excites our contempt or compassion, owing to the sad state to which it is reduced. The idea dominating a story or drama and toward which the scenes or successive situations composing the whole converge, may be very moral, and the impression it leaves in the mind and heart may be good, without one's having the right to conclude that the reading of this story or the representation of this drama offers no danger. What father would be willing to consent to make his daughter a witness to a criminal intrigue and all the circumstances it supposes, provided he was assured that in the end the guilty one would be punished and innocence rewarded?

A drama or a book may be irreproachable from the intellectual or philosophical point of view, and be blameworthy from the point of view of religion or of the heart; and moralists might be less severe if the novels or dramas against which they inveigh had for readers or spectators only philosophers or women, matured by age and experience. But, on the contrary, it happens that the eagerness with which this kind of reading and of play is sought after, is in direct pro-

portion to the danger accompanying it; and one must not be astonished at this, because this danger is a considerable part of the pleasure it procures, and because its charm diminishes in proportion as age, experience, and more serious ideas render it less dangerous.

Moreover, in order to reach the *dénouement* that is to show us virtue triumphant, many delicate situations must be confronted in which it appears weak and tottering? Before seeing that happy impression arise in her heart which the conclusion of the whole work should leave, will not a young woman experience more than one disagreeable emotion, as she sees unfolded before her eyes those tender scenes that deprive the will of its energy and plunge the soul in unspeakable languor? Who will deny that she will retain an impression so deep as to disturb her heart during many successive hours?

Besides, what does she see on the stage and even in the most innocent novels? An artificial world inspiring her with disgust for the one in which she lives; a purely imaginary ideal making the realities constantly under her eyes appear far sadder still. Or she may behold exaggerated and purely conventional passions which leave her a kind of contempt for the quieter and gentler emotions that make the charm of the family and

the happiness of life; or personages adorned by the poet's imagination with every grace and quality, and which, as compared with those a young woman sees around her, sadly bring out all there may be that is mediocre or lacking in them, and cast an unfavorable light on their best qualities. In fact, how small must the calm and respectful love of a Christian husband appear to a young woman's heart after the passionate transports that have impressed and, it may be, enkindled her imagination, in a novel or on the stage?

If she is not careful her life will divide itself, so to speak, into two parts: one, artificial, ideal, poetical, full of agreeable sentiments and sweet emotions; the other, real, prosaic, filled with painful duties and gloomy wearisomeness. Forced by necessity to remain in the real life, she will painfully feel its smallest burdens. Her imagination and heart will take refuge in the false life that has seduced and charmed her. Her husband and children will find her without strength for serious family duties and without taste for the pure enjoyments of an interior and simple life. Her heart, stripped of its sweetest illusions and most attractive hopes, will wither in bitterness and *ennui*, and will seek, perhaps, in more guilty pleasures, a consolation for the imaginary griefs she has created for herself.

XV

ON THE DESIRE OF PLEASING AND ON VANITY

GOD has adorned woman with grace and beauty in order that the virtues of her soul, reflecting themselves on her features and in all her person, may attract man by what there is most noble and elevated in her. And man, seeing some ray of eternal beauty shining in woman's countenance, yields to the attraction that charms him; recognizing the one whom God destined for his companion, he brings his soul close to hers, and unites himself to her in the bonds of an indissoluble union.

True beauty comes from within. When woman, through sincere piety, fervent prayer, and sweet contemplation, knows how to maintain herself at that height where souls are transfigured, the light that illumines her heart is seen casting its reflections without; and her body, similar to a light, transparent veil, in some way takes with admirable suppleness all the dispositions of the

soul, and discovers the precious treasure of grace and virtue which it encloses. Each feature of the face is like the unfolding of some holy thought. The gentle and pure light shining in her glance is the radiance of the divine fervor consuming her soul. Her voice is like the sound and echo of a celestial hope; her modest carriage is like the blossoming of the chaste sentiments of her heart. Her presence imposes tender respect in all those who see her, and spreads about her an atmosphere of grace and purity. No bold thought dare rise in the heart of those who look at her. You would say she was a holy picture inviting prayer, awakening pure hopes in the heart, and causing holy desires to mount toward heaven.

The preservation of this beauty requires of those who possess it neither great expense nor much time. It is preserved by the causes that produced it and needs not to be enhanced by the exterior splendor of dress nor by wealth of raiment. Simple and modest clothing, decorous and gracious manners, are the only adornments such indulge in; and their style of dress is so natural, so well in harmony with the modest attitudes of their bodies, that it seems, in some way, to be their reflection. What man has not sometime been struck with admiration at sight

of one of those angels on earth who have consecrated to God their souls and bodies, far from the world and its seductions, and whose beauty, wholly spiritual and heavenly, borrows new charms from the simple poverty of their dress? So true is it that richness of raiment and splendor of attire are not necessary to the beauty that proceeds from within, and that very often, on the contrary, they betray only poverty of soul and great penury of heart.

A beauty all exterior and material, with no relation to the emotions and life of the soul, and receiving nothing from it, is obliged to have recourse to external and artificial means, and to borrow from them the fleeting splendor they need in order to please. Such beauty pleases the eyes and charms the senses; but it does not reach the soul, as the former does. Far from purifying the heart, it disturbs it; far from elevating it to heaven, it debases it to earth. Very often women, deceived by a fatal delusion, prefer this beauty which proceeds from the body to that which emanates from the soul and is addressed to the soul. Neglecting the latter, they give to the former all their time and care. But frequently, also, they are mistaken in their anticipations and calculations, and are all the less pleasing the more they endeavor to please.

There is, in fact, in the candor of the soul, the simplicity of the heart, and the modesty of manners, a charm that no external embellishment can replace in woman.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult for them to renounce this desire to please, which is for woman almost what ambition is for man. And it is, perhaps, this feeling against which it is most important for them to be on their guard, because it is the one that generally has the most fatal results for them. A Christian woman should seek to please only her husband. It is not forbidden her, of course, to try and gain the esteem and deserve the respect of those with whom she must live; it is even a duty for her to avoid carefully what may displease them, and to endeavor without affectation to be agreeable to them in all things. Everything in her, in her words, her actions, and her bearing, should be such that no one could find anything to offend or wound. But she begins to be in error as soon as the desire to please which is innate in her, is arrested upon some man in particular, or when she requires of the men around her anything else than esteem and respect; and she may be sure that from this moment she will have diminished in their minds the idea they had formed of her, and will have weakened in their hearts the

esteem with which, at first, she had inspired them.

The woman who is controlled by the desire to please, is lost to all serious duties of the family and of Christian life. Peace deserts her heart and leaves therein trouble and bitter disgust. To express the sad state to which a woman is reduced through inordinate desire to please, she is called vain, that is to say, vacant. Emptiness reigns in her mind, in her heart, and in her whole life.

If women would reflect well on the meaning of this word vanity, they would understand all the excess and sinfulness in the vice it indicates. We call vain, in fact, that which has neither bottom nor consistency, that which is only an appearance and shadow. A vain woman is a woman whose mind is empty of serious thoughts, whose heart is void of lofty and generous sentiments, and whose life, in short, is devoid of noble and great deeds. Vanity changes the primitive constitution of the soul; it lowers the natural elevation of the intellect, and bends its thoughts toward the earth. The heart, withered and weak, soon loses that precious elasticity that formerly permitted it to rise again to heaven, and it bends with all its weight toward the miseries of this life, as one sees stretching toward the ground the withered branches of a plant frozen by the winter's cold.

XVI

ON THE WILL AND THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

WOMEN often imagine that because they are destined to obey, it is not necessary for them to form and develop the will, and that this faculty, far from being useful to them, may become the source of much grief and affliction. Mothers, starting from this false principle, far from cultivating and strengthening by exercise the will of their daughters, persuade them that they have nothing better to do than to get accustomed never to will anything, and thus they stifle in their children's souls the faculty most precious and necessary in all the circumstances of life, the one wherein lies principally the morality of man here below, all dignity, all integrity, all happiness.

This false direction given to the education of women, and which has, almost always, as its sequel such fatal results, proceeds from con-

founding, usually, the will with obstinacy and stubbornness, and making obedience consist in a blind impulse of the spirit; whereas, it is true to say that the will is never so necessary as in the circumstances in which one is forced to obey a superior will, and that nothing is more incompatible with the development of this precious faculty than obstinacy.

Philosophers and moralists have always considered the will as a blind faculty which, not having in itself the light to illumine and direct itself, is obliged to seek that light elsewhere, and to follow the one that is presented to it. This light is the reason or motive of our actions. It is what our Lord calls the eye of the body, when He says in His admirable discourse on the mountain, "If thy eye be simple, thy whole body will be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body will be darksome." Which means that if our mind, which is the eye of the will, is simple and upright, the will and all its actions will be light and luminous; but if our mind be vitiated by any prejudice or passion, the will, deprived of its light, will be blind and plunged in darkness. For, if the mind, which is the light of the will, becomes darkness, what will become of the will which is of its nature obscure and lightless?

All the light and power of the soul being in the intellect, the education of the will, therefore, consists principally in two things: first, to enlighten the intellect by thorough instruction, and, especially, by the light derived from the principles of faith; secondly, to prevent or destroy all the obstacles that can intrude between the mind, wherein lies the luminous focus, and the will, which should receive its rays. In order that the intellect may be clear, and give to the will a very pure light, it must be in constant communication with God, the source of all knowledge and light. This relation between the soul and the light where truth is established, is maintained by both natural and supernatural means. Both are always at our disposal, especially the latter, because God never fails those who invoke and seek Him sincerely.

Parents can assist effectively in forming the minds of their children, whose development in this respect depends largely on the first education they receive. To give women from their earliest years right notions on men and things habitually under their eyes, to present life, its aim, its realities, duties, pleasures, and griefs from its true point of view, to accustom them to judge soundly of events of which they are witnesses, to make them catch a glimpse of the

results in the causes that still keep them hidden, to accustom them to foresee the future, to go back to principles, to pursue with a sure and firm step to the most remote effects; to occupy their minds often with the consideration of the truths that faith teaches us, and to make them deduce from them the practical consequences that may have the greatest importance for them in life; such is the function, such are the duties, of a wise Christian mother. It is by these means that she will enlighten her daughter's mind, that she will give to her interior eye that light and simplicity of which Our Lord speaks, and which are for the will so powerful a warrant of strength and energy.

But what will the light of the intellect avail if the will, which it should enlighten, cannot receive its rays, if some prejudice of the imagination, some passion of the heart or senses, comes and obscures the mind, and places itself, like a thick cloud, between it and the will which it should direct? It is, therefore, very important for the happiness of women and for the peace of their lives, that they should prevent in early life the development of those groundless prejudices and of the thousand little passions that arise from the heart at every moment, and that weaken the will by darkening the mind. They

should accustom themselves from an early age to take for motives of their actions not the vain fancies of an ardent and flighty imagination, not the deceitful and fleeting glow of some passion hidden in the recesses of the heart, not the blind and inordinate impulse of some vain or guilty desire, but the sure, clear light of reason and faith.

But to repress the unguided activities of all these inordinate passions, to preserve to the mind all its light, and to the will its peace and energy in the midst of these agitations of the heart, great strength of soul is needed; and it is acquired only by an unceasing subjection of the will and a constant spirit of sacrifice. For one must not imagine that to break the will is to annihilate it and to render it unable to act; nor that to will it is always necessary to oppose one's will to that of others and to make it prevail over theirs. To will is to follow the impulse and light of the intellect. To will is to accomplish a duty, to regulate the capricious movements of the heart or imagination, by submitting them to a higher law; it is to act for a motive that reason or faith can accept.

Man was created to obey, because he is in absolute and continual dependence on God. He obeys even when he commands; for if he commands others, it is not by virtue of his own

natural right, but by virtue of a delegation from God, who transmits to him something of His power and authority; it is not to satisfy his pride or to amuse his vanity but to fulfill an obligation imposed on him by Providence; it is not to subject others arbitrarily to the caprices of his will, but to subject them to the law of God, of whom he is only the interpreter and representative.

To will is to act, as it were, against one's own will and conformably to the Divine will. To will is not to follow the attraction of pleasure or the impulse of pride, vanity, self-love, or private interest; but it is to do what one should do; it is to perform a duty in spite of the repugnance of nature, in spite of the cries of self-love, in spite of the obstacles raised against the will by the unruly passions of the heart or the caprices of the imagination. When passion impels you or pleasure attracts you, when the heart carries you away, you have no need of the will. It is sufficient to give yourself up to your nature, to yield without effort to the impulse that bears you along. But when you are in presence of a duty difficult to perform, and against which all the desires of the heart rebel; when you must submit to a necessity which terrifies and depresses nature; when you must accomplish a sacrifice

which arouses all the repugnance of self-love; when you must accept a situation which humiliates your pride or frightens your sensibility, it is then that the will is necessary, it is then that you will painfully feel the want of it, if you have neglected to form and develop it through self-denial and the habit of sacrifice. When a car must go down a steep hill, it is not necessary to harness to it strong and powerful horses; it is sufficient, sometimes, to start it on the slope which it must descend and abandon it to the momentum that carries it. But if, on the other hand, a rugged mountain is to be climbed, the most vigorous horses will not be too strong: a faithful picture of the diverse situations wherein the will may be placed and of the qualities suitable to each.

To break the will is, therefore, not to destroy it, but to remove its inflexibility; it is to give it that suppleness that will admit of its bending to the most varied necessities, the most widely different obligations; it is to make of it a docile instrument which may follow naturally as it were, the impulse of a virtuous heart, and the light of a generous and noble mind. This suppleness and docility are necessary to man in every situation of life, since there are few occasions that do not demand a great manifestation of the will, and that do not impose difficult and numerous

duties; but it is especially necessary to woman, who is destined to obey always, and whose entire life must be one of sacrifice and self-denial.

The duties of the family, the exigencies of the world, the proprieties of her station, everything is for her an occasion of sacrifice. How will she accomplish the difficult duties imposed on her, if she be accustomed to do only what she pleases; if her inflexible and indocile will refuse to bend to the yoke; if obedience be not familiar to her through long and persevering habit; if she neglect to amend her disposition, to soften its natural harshness, and to break its stubbornness? Marriage, some day, will become intolerable to her, and a source of bitterness and grief. She will do with bad grace the things imposed on her either by circumstances or by the will of a husband who, firmly resolved to make his authority prevail, will refuse to humor the whims of his wife. And if he himself has a stubborn will and violent temper, who can say how many humiliations she will have to endure, how many bitter tears she will have to shed in secret? Constantly opposed in her tastes, obliged to yield unceasingly to force, who knows whether she will not end by taking an aversion to the man to whom she has given her life and to the bonds that bind her to him?

XVII

ON IMAGINATION, ART, AND PERCEPTION OF THE BEAUTIFUL

THE imagination is that faculty which, placed on the confines of the soul and the senses, so to speak, is in immediate relation with these latter, and transmits to the mind the impressions these receive, after having transformed them into pictures and transfigured them, as it were. It is like a bridge thrown over an abyss, between two worlds, that never would touch each other without it, and which, bound by it, are constantly communicating together. The senses would tell nothing to the mind if they did not beforehand take the imagination for interpreter; and the mind, on its part, would tell nothing to the senses if it did not at first confide to the imagination its secret and most intimate thoughts.

The senses, aroused by the external objects that surround and impress them at every moment, receive an impression more or less pro-

found, according to the violence of the sensation that excited them. This impression, received immediately in the imagination by a process whose nature it has not been given man to penetrate, strips itself of all the material elements it had preserved.

Having reached that height and summit which dominates the entire sensible world, it becomes spiritualized and transfigured into a resplendent and glorious image, filling the soul with its admirable light. This image now becomes a thought, for the spiritual world has been entered; and the region where it hovers, sparkling and radiant, is no longer the obscure and low sphere that time and space confine and restrict on every side; it is the high and broad sphere wherein spirits dwell, wherein souls live on truth and love. But this thought, just coming forth from the material envelope that concealed it, and scarcely free from the fetters that restrained its flight, cannot yet rise very high; like the bird whose feathers are beginning to grow, it flutters hither and thither on the borders of the sensible world, and, as it were, only grazes the earth as it touches it lightly with its wing.

In this state thought is presented to the mind under the form of the beautiful, and solicits its adherence. Then rising higher, it reaches the

sphere of the intellect far more radiant even than the first sphere; there becoming brighter with new light, it passes to the glorious state of pure idea, and is clothed with a word which expresses it and serves to identify it. It is not only under the shape of the beautiful that it appears to the mind, but also under the form of the true. Therefore the mind receives it with entire confidence and rests in it with perfect security.

Finally, the heart, smitten with its charms and delighted with its beauty, stoops toward it with complacency, and elevating it to itself, introduces it into a new sphere. There, transfigured again, it appears under the form of the good; it invites all the desires of the soul and solicits all its hopes; it enters, so to speak, even the profoundest depths of the being, and is manifested in the flower and fruit to which it gives birth. For the moral life of man is like the flowering of the thought that habitually occupies his mind and heart; and Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel that our heart is there where our treasure is, and that if our treasure be good, we shall draw good things therefrom, whereas if it be bad, we can draw from it only things of like nature. It is, therefore, very important for us to form a good treasure for ourselves, in order that our hearts being rich in good desires and holy resolutions,

our lives may be rich, also, in good and generous deeds.

Now the most efficacious means for producing this happy result is to watch attentively all the movements of the imagination, and not to let any image penetrate into it which can give rise to false prejudices, to culpable desires, dangerous illusions, or fatal errors. A picture transmitted to our minds by the sensible objects surrounding us is the germ of a thought, a desire; it is sometimes the source of a long succession of reminiscences which fatigue the memory and sully the heart.

Memory may be termed the imagination turning back; and recollection is the image of the past. Memory in man is similar to a vast field where lie buried, like so many germs of promise, the pictures that our soul has collected of the exterior objects that strike our senses. Let a ray of heat come and soften and excite these germs, and you will see produced from them immediately an infinite variety of remembrances, desires, and hopes.

A careful watchfulness over the imagination and all its movements is all the more necessary to woman because with her this faculty reacts with more power and force on all the others. One can say, in a certain sense, that the mind

and heart of woman are governed by her imagination; for often the gravest and loftiest thoughts present themselves to her mind under the form of a picture; and does not God himself, condescending to the exigencies of her nature, often clothe with this form the solicitations of His grace, to make them sweeter and more attractive? Woman seeks the beautiful rather than the true. In order that she may like the good, it must appear to her as something beautiful also, capable of enkindling the noble desires of the heart and exciting her enthusiasm. She aspires to the beautiful with all the powers of her body and soul; and this disposition is for her both the source of the loveliest virtues and the cause of the most fatal illusions.

In fact, the imagination receives the various forms under which the beautiful presents itself to us, and being situated, so to speak, on the extreme confines of the spiritual world, the impression produced on it by the beautiful, although wholly immaterial by its nature, still preserves some vestiges and reminder of the sensible world. The enjoyment it procures to the soul has not at all that dignified composure and majestic serenity which accompanies the pleasures that the contemplation of truth gives to the intellect. It is a more intoxicating pleasure, exciting the soul

rather than giving it rest, stirring it sometimes to the point of raising all the floods of love and poetry concealed in its profound depths, transporting it into a sphere whose distant vagueness escapes its vision.

The beautiful has not those fixed forms, those precise outlines, that characterize truth and permit every unprejudiced mind to recognize it without effort. Moreover, there is no tribunal established by God to determine in an infallible manner what is truly beautiful, and what, as such, deserves our enthusiasm and love. In this sphere, therefore, error is easier and delusion more common.

The passions having deep roots in man's physical organization, their consequences must make themselves felt more directly and more strongly in the imagination, which is situated very closely to the senses, and in constant contact with the sensible world. We are, therefore, greatly tempted to take as beautiful and to love as such what flatters our tastes, what favors our passions, or charms our senses.

If we wish to escape this danger, our minds must be independent enough to preserve all their freedom of judgment and all their clearness, even in the midst of the reveries whose source may be the imagination; and our wills must

have power enough over the latter to restrain its flights within just limits, and to withdraw it from the control of the passions. The intellect, which with us should direct and govern all the other faculties of the soul, must not let the sceptre intrusted to it escape; it should carefully preserve the right to judge in last resort the impressions of the imagination, and the strength of repelling those that have no firm and sure foundation. Our hearts must be pure enough to attach themselves to the good alone, because the errors of the heart react peculiarly on the imagination, and render it still more capricious and arbitrary in its tastes.

If we do not take all these precautions, but accustom ourselves to follow without examination the thoughtless and impetuous movements of our imaginations, and allow ourselves to be guided by the attraction of the beautiful rather than by the light of truth, we shall escape neither the control of the prejudices that obscure the mind, nor the influence of the passions that seduce the heart, nor the caprices of a false and lawless enthusiasm that exhausts and enervates the soul.

In a well-governed kingdom, the frontiers are carefully guarded and defended by powerful fortresses, which, while arresting the enemy, give to the threatened citizens the time to combine their

efforts. The frontier of our soul is the imagination; it is through that the enemy usually attacks us and penetrates to the will; it is, therefore, also at this point that the defence must be brought to bear, for it is there that the rudest combats take place.

XVIII

ON IMAGINATION, ART, AND PERCEPTION OF THE BEAUTIFUL (*continued*)

IT is easy to recognize in the world the women who have let their imaginations gain a fatal ascendency over all the other faculties of their souls. They are hasty and rash in their judgments, capricious and fickle in their tastes, inconstant in their affections, inconsistent in their words, vain and giddy in their lives. Their minds are obscured by a thousand prejudices, and unable to perceive the light that God keeps burning in the conscience of every man to enlighten his thoughts and direct his actions. Their hearts, the playthings of a thousand wayward passions that dispute the mastery of them, no longer have strength enough to follow the attraction of virtue; but, like butterflies, they flit from one object to another, hovering over all the flowers whose perfume attracts them, without stopping at anyone of them, and

burn their wings in the illusive and dazzling light of the objects that flatter the senses. Their enfeebled wills no longer have energy enough to accomplish the painful duties that a trying position often imposes on them, nor to accept with devotion the sacrifices it requires. Truth no longer has any power over their souls. The stern practices of reason, matured by experience, do not suit their fickle and thoughtless minds, whose impatience cannot lend itself to the slow but surer progress of reasoning. Incapable of reflection and examination, they decide, in questions that interest them, from vain and frivolous motives furnished them by the prejudices of their minds or the passions of their hearts. They have settled convictions neither on men nor on things, but only opinions which vary according to the will of their fancies or their self-love. They are enamoured with those who flatter their vanity, or who enter willingly into the petty passions of their hearts and into the trifles of their lives; and then they part from them with equal alacrity and thoughtlessness. They fall in love with the ideas that can offer a point of support to their pride or an excuse for the prejudices with which their minds are filled; and afterward they reject them with scorn, when they no longer see in them a

means of shining in the eyes of others, and of displaying the qualities they think they possess. Blind in their opinions, in their sentiments, and in their tastes, they pass without reasonable motives from aversion to enthusiasm, from esteem to contempt, from hatred to love. They cannot keep within the true limit of things; but they constantly plunge from one excess to the opposite. Their decisions are affected by the exaggeration of their minds and the unnatural enthusiasm of their hearts. Extravagant in their praise and in their blame, they proclaim as admirable and divine what they approve, and as horrible and monstrous what they dislike; but, far from making their opinions shared by sound and sensible minds, they excite in them, on the contrary, a sort of instinctive repugnance by the exaggerated manner in which they express themselves. They like and seek what is extraordinary, what can distinguish them from others and elevate them above others; they sometimes affect an erudition and airs unsuited to them, and often end by becoming unendurable and ridiculous, while wishing to appear amiable and interesting.

But far different is the woman who, at an early age, learns how to regulate her imagination and direct wisely its first flights. Accessible to every-

thing that is truly beautiful, she is not unaccustomed to any grand idea, any generous sentiment. Her noble and courageous soul rises on the wings of enthusiasm to those heights where fine minds like to rest. Piety, patriotism, love, friendship, all those sentiments that cause generous hearts to beat, find access to hers and draw new strength in the native energy of her heart. Everything that enters into her being takes the large and lofty dimensions of her soul, and becomes great and noble like her. She can elevate things the most mediocre in appearance. An exquisite sentiment of the beautiful accompanies and directs the words proceeding from her lips, the attitudes and movements of her body, and gives to her conversation, to her eyes, and even to her silence that inexpressible charm, grace, and harmony which attract all hearts to her. Truth never presents itself to her mind without awakening in her heart the sentiment of the beautiful and in her imagination the image of the good. For her the good is only the exaltation of truth, and the beautiful is only its splendor. Therefore the contemplation of the beautiful gives to her soul ineffable joys; and she knows how to make others share them through the sweet and persuasive manner with which she expresses what she feels.

The Perfect Woman

Her heart is like a sanctuary adorned with holy pictures, each one of which wakens a pious remembrance or a heavenly hope. The divine harmonies of her soul and the chaste beauties of her thought reflect themselves in her whole exterior and give to her person a something of repose, which, far from hindering naturalness, heightens it, on the contrary, and gives it a new charm; for just as her imagination, rich in art and poetry, can embellish the objects that the external world transmits to her and can tint them with the most vivid and freshest colors, so can she improve by the graces of an ingenuous art the most natural movements and the simplest attitudes of her body.

With her, art and nature constantly lend each other assistance; nature does not derange the ingenious combinations of art, nor does art hamper, in their free expression, the instinctive movements of nature. These two things are so intimately connected in all her person that one would say, on seeing her, that they were given her at the same time; and one doubts whether art preceded and formed nature, or whether art be not a direct emanation and a blossoming of the latter.

Her life is like a flower whose sweet perfume rejoices and purifies the heart of all those who

approach it. Even grief and physical suffering, which nearly always change, in a perceptible manner, the features and freshness of a woman, have less mastery over her, because she possesses within herself an inexhaustible source of grace and beauty. The sentiment of the beautiful accompanies her even in the tortures of illness, and prevents her from yielding unreservedly to the painful impressions they produce. Art comes to her aid in these terrible junctures when exhausted nature seems to have no more energy to react, and it preserves to the attitudes and movements of her body that dignity and calm which is the beauty of suffering souls and pain-stricken bodies. She is patient toward suffering and gentle toward death, just as she was indulgent toward life. And sometimes, too, death is gentle, sparing her the frightful torments of a humiliating agony; and the angels receive her soul to bear it to the eternal abode, as one gathers fruit ripened to fullness by summer heat.

The imagination is a precious faculty which, well directed, can render the accomplishment of our duties easier by enkindling in our souls a holy enthusiasm for virtue, and inspiring a salutary horror for evil. It would, therefore, be acting both against the designs of God, who gives us nothing useless and against our own interests,

to try to stifle within us the sacred spark of enthusiasm, by restraining the imagination which is its chief seat. We should, indeed, rather carefully maintain this sacred fire, by nourishing it with holy pictures, noble thoughts, high contemplations, and generous sentiments; giving it access only to what is truly great, truly beautiful, truly worthy of admiration and love. Prayer, meditation, frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures, and of books that piety has inspired, retirement from the world, its pleasures, its theatres and festivities, are the most proper means of obtaining this so desirable result.

But the woman who reads without precaution all the books offered to her; she who is constantly seen at those theatres where everything conspires to kindle dangerous passions in her heart; she whose imagination is opened, like a public highway, to every kind of thought, to the most antagonistic impressions; she who never enters within herself through recollection and meditation, who never places herself in prayer under God's eye, but whose thoughts and desires spread, like water without a barrier, over an infinite multitude of objects; she whose insatiable curiosity likes to feed on the rumors and news that ill-will retails; she whose frivolous life is dissipated in the sterile occupations of

dress and vanity; she who yields her heart without discernment to the most dangerous affections, and who imprudently compromises the peace and innocence of her life in situations that are trying for the most assured virtue, — such a one, far from finding in her imagination a source of consolation and enjoyment, will find, on the contrary, only a pitfall of confusion and danger. For this faculty, so precious when well directed, becomes fatal when, through our negligence, we have let it take precedence over the others; when, instead of submitting it to the intellect, we abandon it for a long time to its own caprices, and surrender to it as prey our soul and entire life.

One of the most fatal results of this negligence is that the imagination finally absorbs every faculty of the soul. It takes the place of intellect, judgment, heart, and will. We think we understand; it is the imagination that is playing with a grand and sublime idea, and is flitting on its surface like a butterfly on a flower. We think we judge; we are only yielding to a prejudice that blinds us, to a prepossession of our mind, or a preoccupation of our heart. We think we will; we are only following the attraction of a pleasure that seduces us, or the voice of a passion that sways us. But a far more deplorable thing yet! We

think we love, and we are only obeying the impulse of a refined egotism which is wrapped and hidden in the deepest recesses of the heart, withering the source of the purest affection and the most generous feelings. Therefore, as soon as the object to which we had clung has lost the charm that attracted us, we leave it with the same force with which we had first approached it. And this inconstancy is one of the surest signs by which we can recognize whether our affection was the sport of our imagination, and not a profound and thoughtful feeling of our heart.

In this manner we live in a world of delusions and error, deceiving ourselves even more than others, ignorant of the true nature and the real aim of our most intimate thoughts and feelings, attaching ourselves to the surface of things without ever penetrating to their depth, not knowing where we are going or whence we come; walking blindfolded in the midst of men and things; purchasing at the cost of our peace, and often even of our virtue, a useless experience, because the weakness of our mind and the powerlessness of our will prevent us from profiting thereby. Thus we go from one delusion to another, to the one that is the most terrible of all, because, being the last, it cannot be repaired. Often, in fact, the woman

who during her life allowed herself to be guided and fascinated by her imagination cannot resolve to separate herself from this deceitful guide in death. The last look she casts on her life is still a delusion, and her eyes open to light only on the great day of eternity. She understands then, but too late, that her entire life has been only a continuous illusion and an unceasing falsehood, and that all on earth is vanity excepting to love God and to serve Him alone.

XIX

CURIOSITY

CURIOSITY, like all other passions, is not to be condemned in itself. God has given it to us in order to render easier the study of things that we should know, by urging us to learn them through the attraction of the pleasure that their knowledge procures for us. Applied to things important for us to know, and confined within the just limits which should circumscribe and regulate the movement of all our passions, curiosity, far from being a fault or a danger, is, on the contrary, a duty and a source of enjoyment for our minds and hearts. It is to curiosity that we are indebted in great part for the development of our intellects and the progress with which society justly honors itself.

It begins to become dangerous only when we direct it toward a useless or bad object, or when, leaving its proper limits, it is directed with inordinate activity to the objects to which we apply it. It becomes fatal when, instead of develop-

ing our minds by concentrating their activities on the things it is most important for them to know, and for the study of which they feel they have particular dispositions, it scatters their forces, and diminishes their energy by urging them, without rule or measure, on a multitude of objects whose variety produces confusion. It becomes reprehensible when, instead of maintaining in us humility and modesty by making us understand that beyond the things we know, there is an infinite multitude which we do not know and which we shall never succeed in knowing, it feeds our vanity and pride by permitting us to think that our minds have reached the last limits of knowledge, and by inspiring us with an unjust contempt or those who know less than we. It is bad when, proceeding from that fatal error which ruined Eve and the human race with her, it suggests to us the desire of being like gods, and of learning evil, not from that speculative knowledge that sometimes serves to prevent it, but from that practical knowledge procured by experience which gives the taste for it and even persuades us often of the need of it.

This curiosity is for women the source of many dangers and faults; and more than one owes to it, perhaps, the errors and disgrace of her life. Woman has for mission and object to know truth,

not so much in order to teach it as to feel it, and make it attractive to others. The functions of her heart are broader than those of her mind; and as soon as the latter exceeds the limits traced for it by Providence and determined by the aim to which it should aspire, woman loses in our eyes something of her charm and even of her authority. She can lead us away from evil all the better, the more she appears not to know it. We like to see her astonished at certain excesses that corruption has rendered too frequent, and we like her not even to suspect the existence of certain disorders that immorality multiplies every day under our eyes. The innocence of woman likes to shelter itself under the veil of a chaste ignorance, and it alarms the modesty of her soul to raise this protecting veil.

Unfortunately, there are few men who understand woman's true nature and know how to respect the demands of her heart and the delicacy of her conscience. Although they believe that innocence, the companion of ignorance, is perfectly becoming to the unmarried state, yet they do not appreciate it in woman engaged in the bonds of matrimony.

Men do not know that curiosity is a passion that is never awakened with impunity in the heart

of woman; that the nearer she views the evil of which she was formerly ignorant, the less aversion and horror she conceives for it; that, inclined to exaggeration, it is difficult for her to keep within the true limit of things; and that this exaggeration, if it is sometimes harmful to her, is greatly profitable when it is directed to the thought of evil; for, whether it be considered from the standpoint of faith or whether it be examined solely from reason's point of view, we can never conceive too much horror of it. They do not know that woman is prone to love the things for which she does not feel a supreme repugnance, and that her heart is inclined to lean toward those to which her mind and eyes have been accustomed.

Many women have sought, at first, in an acquaintance, a reading, a conversation that seemed innocent, to satisfy only their curiosity; and they have experienced later, at the expense of their innocence and happiness, that woman's curiosity is associated with the worst instincts of the heart, and that often it leads, on the one hand to follies that sully the soul, on the other hand to envy, which withers the heart, censures without mercy the faults of others, and delights in the recollection and thought of their errors. Rarely, in fact, does a woman who does not

watch herself and who cannot repress in time the movements of an inordinate curiosity, escape from these two vices at once. She often avoids the first only to fall into the second. And then we see her eagerly looking for the faults of others, living on gossip, perverting the purest intentions, ruining the finest reputations, and spreading everywhere the poison with which her wicked and envious soul is infected.

XX

ON THE CHOICE OF A FRIEND

WOMAN'S heart is an abyss of love. It is capable of affections the most diverse in their nature. As soon as an object presents itself, it is suddenly wrapped in love and tenderness; and often one does not know what should be most admired in a woman her love for husband or her tenderness for children; her dutiful submission to her parents or devotion to a brother or sister; her frank confidence in a friend or compassionate love for the poor. Her heart knows how to rise toward what is higher, in order to admire and venerate it, and to bend toward what is near, to love and cherish it, and to stoop toward what is lower, to support and sustain it. She has a smile for every joy, a tear for every grief, a consolation for every misery, an excuse for every fault, a prayer for every misfortune, an encouragement for every hope. Her heart always responds to him who knocks, and opens easily to the confession that invites her confidence.

But, as a consequence of the disorder that sin introduced in our nature, that which is highest in us always has by its side a weight, which tends to pull it down to earth and to balance it. For it was resolved in the decrees of God that man should acquire by struggle the qualities he lacked, and should preserve, in like manner, those he already possessed. As if he were not unfortunate enough in not having all that is needed for his perfection and happiness, and in being obliged to struggle against the bad instincts of his nature, but must, besides, suffer, as it were, from the good that is in him and distrust it, and must, by unflagging vigilance, prevent the happy dispositions of his heart from deteriorating. For if he rest on a false security, or if he rely on his pride, the good in his heart becomes the source of fatal delusions and grave dangers; and it has been seen more than once that the strongest virtue and the noblest instincts disappear in the deep abysses of too tender and confiding a heart.

It is, therefore, important for a woman to choose well the friends to whom she is to give her confidence and affection; for a young woman's heart lives on what she loves and receives in influence what she gives in confidence and friendship. To love, for her, is to

obey; it is to follow a guidance willingly; it is to follow the footsteps of some one in order to imitate that person; it is to allow herself to be guided and governed by a heart to which sympathy or habit has attracted her. It has been said that woman's mind is in her heart. Perhaps one might, with as much reason, say the same thing of her will, and the woman who keeps it only half gives away her heart.

Unfortunately, there are many women who have been captivated at an early age by the tyranny of the world, and who have lost that candor and bloom of the soul which a pious and modest life entertains. These women seem jealous of those who, happier than they, have preserved these precious qualities of the heart; and to see them one would say that they seek to revenge themselves on the others for the blighting power the world exercised on themselves. They stand, as it were, at the world's gate, in order to observe the better those who enter therein, and to guide their first steps. They know how to win the confidence of a young woman, still untaught and docile, by a a thousand ingenious artifices, the irresistible power of which they have already experienced more than once. They know how to divine her secret instincts, and to anticipate her

hidden desires. They flatter her weaknesses with deceitful indulgence; and with a false condescension, they excite the passions that can weaken the energy of her character and deliver it, defenceless, to their pernicious influence. To her inexperience and timidity, they lend the support of their worldly knowledge, not to preserve her from the dangers they, themselves, knew not how to avoid, but to lead her, on the contrary, in the paths they formerly trod.

Among women that have been ruined in the world, few there are that do not owe their fall to harmful guidance or pernicious counsels; and there is not one, perhaps, who might not, by better-placed confidence and better-chosen friendship, have saved herself from ruin.

But what draws hearts together most frequently is a blind sympathy, or the habit of being together, or a certain similarity of tastes and passions. A young woman seeks an indulgent friend who will tolerate her failings and excuse her faults. Sometimes she even prefers a friend who shares her faults and who, through her frivolous behavior, is constrained to a fatal indulgence toward her. Now, similarity of tastes, which is a motive of attraction between two virtuous souls, should, on the contrary, separate those who can find a point of contact only in an

error or in a weakness of the heart. The choice of a woman friend is sometimes as important for a young person as that of a confessor, and when her position renders a friend necessary, as it often happens, she should, in making her choice, devote all the time and care required by so grave an affair, the results of which may be so vital to her happiness.

This friend should have, above all, a sincere, broad, and enlightened piety. This is the most delicate point and requires the most serious reflections. A false and narrow piety may sometimes have as many drawbacks as the absence of piety, and may influence counsels and conduct that might be fatal to happiness and salvation. A worldly woman justifies the faults confided to her; a Christian woman, while censuring them, knows how to have enough indulgence and charity in her heart to raise the guilty one in her own eyes and restore the feeling of her dignity. She knows, especially, how to anticipate new faults by her counsels, and how to render confessions, which are always humiliating to self-love, less painful through the kindness with which she receives them.

This friend must have, moreover, enough experience of the world to be able to see its snares and dangers, and to make them known. She

must have enough experience in life to appreciate its necessities and proprieties, to discern what is inevitable, dangerous, or false in a situation, and to suggest to the one who is in such a position the means of withdrawing successfully. Women whose hearts were for a time enslaved by the world, but who have returned to a better life and nobler sentiments, can be of great help to those who, younger than they, see themselves exposed to the same dangers; and the past of those whom experience has taught and strengthened, can direct the future of those who are still inexperienced and ignorant.

This friend must also be frank and courageous; for it requires courage to warn a young woman of a danger she does not perceive, and to extricate her from a situation whose fatal results she does not foresee. She must be discreet and prudent; for a secret intrusted should find its security in the discretion of the one receiving it, the same as an counsel received should have a security in the prudence of the one who gives it. A friendship of this kind can be for a young woman in the world a source of blessings and happiness; it can warn her against many dangers, save her from many faults, it can mitigate in her heart the bitterness of a deep sorrow, dull in her conscience the sting of a keen remorse,

give support to her fainting hopes and raise them again to Heaven, lend assistance to her wavering virtue, give to her thoughts a holy and lofty direction, keep the sentiments of her heart within the limits they should never overstep, and give to her whole life that wholesome air which preserves from the contagion to which a young woman in the world is always more or less exposed. Some day, perhaps, when, ready to quit this life, she casts a last glance over the way she has travelled in her exile, and sees the dangers that beset her path, she will bless the kind hand that preserved her from them; and the image of the one who was for her a guardian angel will protect her last moments too, and will hover above her death-bed like a precious pledge of the happiness that God reserves in a better life, and like a reward beforehand for her confidence and docility.

XXI

ON WORKS OF MERCY

THE Apostle Saint James teaches us that true piety, agreeable to God, consists in visiting the orphans and widows in their tribulation. It is to women, perhaps, even more than to men, that these words of the Apostle are addressed; because, less absorbed in business cares, which often require all the time and activity of the latter, they can give more time to works of mercy, from which no Christian family should dispense itself. Moreover, does it not seem that God in giving to woman a tenderer heart, one more easily moved at the sight of the great distress that abounds in this valley of tears, more disposed to pity, more generous and devoted, — does it not seem that He has intrusted to her the holy and noble mission of relieving and consoling the unfortunate and the poor, increased among us in such a frightful manner through the coldness of faith and charity? It is to answer this call that so many holy daughters consecrate them-

selves by vows to the relief of all miseries, in the religious orders through which the Church seeks to counterbalance the deplorable progress of selfishness and pride. But women destined to married life are not exempt, on that account, from the sublime duties which God has confided to their sex. We have already seen that among the qualities that the Holy Spirit assigns to the strong woman He counts mercy and charity, when He says that she opens her hands to the poor, and stretches her arms to the needy. Mercy has never been more necessary, because never have the miseries that require it been greater or more numerous; and the constitution of actual society scarcely allows one to hope that the evil will diminish. Everything must make us fear, on the contrary, that it will increase; and if charity, which should heal it, does not increase in the same ratio, what will become of the poor, who have no other resource than the compassion of the rich, since God, in depriving them of the goods of this world, forbids them to procure these goods for themselves by fraud or violence?

Everything is God's. He alone is master, proprietor, and lord, in the rigorous sense of these words; for He alone has sovereign dominion over all that exists, and has power to dispose of it as He pleases. Nothing escapes this sovereign

dominion. Our bodies and souls belong to Him as well as the objects surrounding us, which He allows us to dispose of. When He wishes to give us in abundance external goods, it is not for the purpose of using them according to our caprices and of employing them for ourselves. In giving them to us He does not lose their ownership, and He always reserves the right of prescribing the use we should make of them, and of asking an account of what we have done with them. We are, really, in His eyes only the depositaries and administrators of the goods He dispenses to us, and every gift He bestows on us is a talent which we must make profitable for His glory.

If He had distributed His gifts equally among all men, mercy and charity on the one hand, and gratitude and humility on the other, would be impossible. No bond, no duty, no relation could exist among men, since every relation rests on a duty, and every duty implies a bond, and every bond has its significance in an inequality. It is, therefore, the inequality of gifts and conditions that renders society possible. But this inequality does not prevent the equality of men before God, to whom all belong equally, since He has created them all through His power and redeemed them through His love, and since all have the same beginning and end. He is equally

in the rich and in the poor: in the first, to inspire in them mercy and charity, and to preserve them from pride; and in the second, to inspire in them humility and patience, and to keep them from despair. Riches and poverty come equally from Him; both are gifts, different in their natures, but similar in their source and purpose, since they have for aim both the glory of God and our sanctification. Or, rather, to speak according to the Gospel, one should say that the condition of the poor and that of the rich are not equal in the eyes of God, but that the former have the better part, and that salvation is much more difficult for the latter.

If society were what it should be, if the principles and the doctrine of the Gospel animated its constitution and regulated all its relations, the portion of the poor would be the better, not only in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of men. The rich could scarcely console themselves for their misfortune, on considering the dangers to which their condition exposes them; and they would have to guard against discouragement. The poor, on the other hand, would have to arm themselves against pride, at the sight of the advantages that God grants them. The former would be the servants of the latter, and would consider themselves the administrators of their wealth.

One must not conceal it from oneself, that the Gospel has only anathemas for riches, threats for the rich; it has only praise for poverty, hopes and congratulations for the poor. Neither may one conceal the fact that of all sins, the one that furnishes a most abundant matter in God's judgment is the insensibility and harshness of the rich toward the poor; and that God considers Himself personally outraged in the latter, when they receive from the former any unjust refusal. When our Lord Jesus Christ wished to represent the last judgment with all there is consoling for the just and awful for the wicked, of all the good works of the former He recalls only their works of mercy, and of all the bad deeds of the latter He reproaches them only for their harshness toward the poor. And to give more solemnity to the praises He addresses to the former, and to the reproaches he makes to the latter, He says He is present in the poor and unfortunate whom the former have consoled and the latter despised. Not because there are no other good works save works of mercy, nor other crimes except those engendered by harshness toward the poor, but because works of mercy are the most important in the affair of salvation.

In every family to which God has given the goods of this world in abundance, there should

be an almoner charged with dispensing them to the poor, and one representing these latter and pleading their cause with the head of the family. This function belongs especially to woman. It is she who ought every year to lay aside the portion of the poor, and by works of mercy and charity preserve the family from the maledictions that God reserves to the wicked rich, and draw upon it the blessings He promises to those who are merciful toward the needy. Formerly, when languages were Christian as well as the nations who spoke them, the portion of the poor was called God's portion, just as the houses that served them for refuge were called God's houses, *les hôtels de Dieu*. The portion of the needy is, therefore, the first, the best, and the most important, since it is the only one that bears interest for heaven and eternity, the only one that increases the sum of our merits, and renders us truly rich in the eyes of God.

It is mercy which preserves money from the pollution that seems inherent to it, and that prevents it from becoming a means of iniquity, as the Gospel always calls it. The merciful woman rests her soul in the goods of this life as the bee rests on flowers. From these perishable goods she knows how to extract, by industrious charity, a sweet and pure honey which nour-

ishes and rejoices the heart and gives to the soul strength to advance with perseverance to the end and to reach it with safety. A truly Christian woman, fully penetrated with the sense of her duties, always finds means to lay aside for the poor the part that falls to them by right; and although she cannot dispose of the family possessions according to her will, and as she must, in everything that concerns the use of them, submit to the will of her husband, who is the administrator, she can, nevertheless, almost always make him share the merciful feelings that fill her soul. If she were as eloquent when she begs the portion of the poor as she is when she asks for the means that the proprieties or even the caprices of fashion render necessary for the maintenance of her vanity, she would, indeed, know how to soften her husband's heart and obtain from him the aid that charity implores.

Besides, almsgiving does not consist only in giving bread to those who have none, but it consists in alleviating all suffering; and it is all the more agreeable to God because this misery is deeper and the goods it gives are of a higher order. Each need of the body or of the soul demands a particular alms. To give light to minds darkened by error or prejudices; to give love to the poor abandoned souls that have no

hearts on which to lean; to give good advice to those who are tormented by fearful uncertainty; to give peace to those who have lost it: all these are alms the price of which God alone knows. If you have nothing to give, give your heart, give your charity, your prayers, your pity, and your tears; give to those who suffer the example of your patience and virtues, give yourself: this is the most precious alms you can give, and this is always at your disposal.

XXII

ON DUTIES TO SERVANTS

WOMEN who have enjoyed the favor of God and felt the sweetness of His yoke, are exposed to two dangers situated at the two extremities of the path they pursue; for either they persuade themselves that it suffices to think of their own salvation without trying to procure that of others; or, forgetting themselves through a mistaken zeal, they yield without caution or rule to the good instincts and natural generosity of their hearts. But neither are within the true limits of Christian piety; they are both equally victims of a fatal delusion.

The former forget that virtue consists in the accomplishment of all the duties imposed on them, and that if it is permitted to women living in virginity to occupy themselves only with their own salvation, the one to whom God has intrusted the care of a family can sanctify herself only by

working with zeal and perseverance at the sanctification of those under her charge.

If God, according to the fine expression of the prophet-king, commands each one of us to think of his neighbor, should not this command apply in a very special manner to those who, being placed above others, are obliged by their state to shed upon the latter the light that shines in their souls? It is difficult for him who bears in his heart the sweet odor of Christ not to shed around him something of the perfume that pervades His entire life; and I should pity him who, wishing to keep for himself the favor of God, would have no concern whatever to share it with others. For every centre of light or heat has around it a more or less extended sphere which it penetrates with its rays. Life cannot exist without manifesting itself by some exterior and sensible phenomena; and of all lives, I do not know any more communicative and expansive than the life of grace.

Moreover, among those whom God has associated with His glory in heaven, and who were able on earth to practise toward their brothers this apostleship which virtue confers, I do not know of one who has not considered it a duty and who has not fulfilled that grand mission. God will demand an account of mothers of families,

not only of what they have done to assure their own salvation, but also of what they have done to assure the salvation of all the souls committed to their care.

But if, instead of concealing the light they have received, they ought to place it on a candlestick, in order to enlighten in their pathways those whose direction and guidance are in their charge, they ought, also, to take care not to dim it by placing it too high, or by bearing it at too great a distance. The apostleship that God has intrusted to woman is not of the same nature as that with which He honors the priest; and she ought to seek to carry outside the zeal and charity that inflame her soul only after having abundantly spread the flames in the bosom of the family.

Now, the family does not consist only of the husband to whom she has given her life, and the children whom she has borne; but also of all those who help her in the administration of her household and whose services money alone can never sufficiently repay; because man, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, is something so grand that no material object can compensate him for the care he gives us. Moreover, in certain countries, where the spirit of Christianity has penetrated more deeply into the language,

the servants of a household are called the family, and with us they are called domestics because they belong to the house where they serve, and constitute a part of the family that claims their care. Our duties toward them are of such importance that God, in the sacred Scriptures, does not hesitate to declare that he who does not care for his servants is worse than an infidel. It may be said, in fact, that in a certain sense the Christian is distinguished from the infidel in that the latter has slaves for servants, whom he considers as strangers to his family and as naturally inferior to him, while the Christian, knowing through faith that those who serve him have a common origin with him, have been redeemed as well as himself by the blood of Jesus Christ, and are, perhaps, in the eyes of God far superior to him, respects in them the character they received in common with him in baptism, and considers them members of his family whom God has placed nearer His heart in order that they may be loved the more.

It is especially to woman, who is the angel of the family, that belong the supervision and education of servants. Man, often obliged to carry his activity farther and to give his time and thoughts to duties of another nature, can only rarely descend to the details of the cares exacted

by the family, and generally he must limit himself in this matter to giving impulse and general direction, leaving to the wife the care of applying the impulse he has once given to definite obligations.

Woman, in fact, besides having more time for duties of this kind, is also, by her nature, more favorably disposed to their accomplishment. Her heart, more tender, more compassionate and devoted, knows better how to stoop toward those who are beneath her in order to pour into their souls something of her own. More patient than man, she knows better how to condescend to the ignorance and rudeness of those whose early education has neither enlightened their minds nor softened their manners. She knows better how to adapt herself to their weaknesses and needs, and by a compassionate and devoted charity to bridge the chasm that laws or customs have cast between masters and servants.

A truly Christian woman should, therefore, consider the education of her servants as her principal concern, should convince herself that her first duties are in the family, and that to neglect them in order to go and seek others, farther removed or higher, is not to understand Christian piety; it is yielding to strange delusions and taking for the inspirations of God the

promptings of a proud spirit or of an unruly imagination. She is not responsible in the eyes of God for the faults of those who have not been intrusted to her, and if they are lost He will not require of her an account of their ruin; but if, through her neglect, her servants indulge in guilty excesses, she must not hope that God will take account of the good she will have done elsewhere, while omitting to do that which was imposed on her in her household.

I know that family duties have nothing attractive to self-love and nothing flattering to vanity; that it is often more agreeable to a heart not yet entirely detached from self to exercise its activity in a higher and wider sphere. But I know also that the most modest positions are often the safest; that duties which flatter self-love expose one to many delusions, while those which thwart nature have nothing that can awaken our distrust; that the good we have to do is not situated far from us, but is, in some way, close at hand, and we can accomplish it at every moment of our lives.

Moreover, if the good situated in higher spheres has something pleasing to pride, that which we do around us in the family circle has also something sweet to the heart and consoling to a truly Christian soul. If the poor,

among whom we go to seek those who serve us, have not that refinement of manners and exterior distinction which early education gives, they have qualities not less precious which the education of the higher classes often only weaken. The poor man, who sells you the services of his arms, has in his heart something he does not sell, but which he reserves for those who appreciate the value of gratitude, and who think it well worth while to do something to deserve it.

A word of consolation, a gracious look, a kind attention, a service that costs you nothing, often suffices to make a faithful friend of a man in whom you had, at first, sought only a servant. If you know how to divine all that is noble, generous, and devoted under that rude and coarse covering, if you know how to extract, by diligent charity, all those precious treasures from the depths that conceal them, you will prepare for your heart very sweet enjoyment and abundant consolation for your life.

Raise your thoughts by faith, and in this servant, rendered inferior to you through his position, see a brother who serves the same God as you, who has, like you, been redeemed with His blood, and who is one day to share His glory. Never let any word or gesture of scorn make him feel the difference of position which separates

you, by revealing to him that you yourself feel the difference. But try, on the contrary, to uplift and ennoble his condition in his own eyes, by making him understand that it does not arrest the development of any natural quality nor any virtue, and that, if it is less brilliant than yours in the eyes of men, yours, on the other hand, is more difficult and less safe in the eyes of God.

It is not necessary that you should descend from the pedestal on which God has placed you, nor forget what renders you superior to your servants. You should, on the contrary, if you have a sincere desire of doing them good, never lose sight of your dignity and never allow a familiarity, which might be equally harmful to both, to establish itself between you and them. It is God who has appointed in society these degrees and ranks which constitute its order and hierarchy. Every man must accept the one in which Providence has placed him, because there is none from which he cannot rise toward heaven. But every one must, also, without leaving the rank in which he has been placed, through the impulse of a merciful charity bend toward those who are placed beneath him, in order to lift them to a higher and more luminous sphere.

Your servants will rarely be deceived in the motives of your condescension. If it has for its

principle some unruly passion or some vice of the heart; if you mingle with them because, tired of a position which is too high for you, you feel, in a way, the need of descending to a lower sphere to breathe more at your ease; if you go and seek among them some companion or confidante of your weaknesses; if you descend to their plane to amuse your leisure, to feed your malicious and restless curiosity with the recital of scandalous adventures, which furnish such abundant matter in the conversation of corrupt or idle women; in a word, if you never come into contact with them except through some bad side of your nature, and if the intercourse which binds you together consists in an exchange of sinful flattery or wrongful passion, — far from taking your condescension kindly, they will turn it into a weapon against you, and will reward your indulgence with contempt. How many women in the world have become the slaves of servants by taking them as confidantes, or witnesses of the frailties of their hearts or the wretchedness of their lives! How many women are governed by servants whose assistance and advice they have imprudently sought in enterprises wherein they have compromised their innocence and happiness! How many women vainly regret the humiliating yoke that weighs on their souls, and

are obliged to keep and spare servants whom an imprudence on their part has rendered the keepers of their reputations and arbiters of their destinies!

But if, all the while preserving your authority and knowing how to make it respected by others you know, nevertheless, how to make it sweet and amiable; if you appear to be tenacious of it more for your servants than for yourself; if they perceive that your condescension is the effect, not of the weakness of your character, nor of some disorder of your heart, but from a truly Christian humility and charity; if you know how to keep the medium between a cold and haughty stiffness and a misplaced familiarity, it will not be long ere you inspire them with deep veneration, respectful confidence, and unlimited devotion. For those who serve others are so little accustomed to find in their masters affection and respect, that the least mark of good-will often suffices to make fast friends of them.

A Christian woman should be the mother of her servants. She should take care of them as if they were her children; watch over the needs of their bodies, but much more over the needs of their souls; and make them understand, by the very special attention she gives to the latter, that their souls are of a much higher nature than their

bodies, and that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." She should reprove them firmly and gently at the same time, and temper the harshness of her reproaches with a merciful and indulgent charity. She should be very careful not to be carried away by her natural impatience or by anger, and thereby weaken in their minds the lofty idea they have conceived of her character and virtue.

Let her see to it that they are sufficiently instructed in the truths of religion; for faith is the best guarantee of the qualities that are esteemed and most sought after in them. Let her exhort them more by her example than by her words, to the accomplishment of the duties that religion prescribes them. Let her seek to render piety both sweet and venerable to them, by presenting it under its true aspect, as the source of the most noble actions, the most generous sentiments, and as the highest and holiest aim of man on this earth. Let prayer gather them all around her morning and evening with one common thought; and mingled with her children at the feet of their Eternal Father, let them learn that beyond this world there is a better and truer world, where all distinctions of fortune and rank are obliterated, and where man remains alone in the presence of

God. Let their souls, uplifted by the same prayer, ascend together toward the throne of Him with whom there is no other distinction than that of merits, whose source is His grace, and whose recompense is His glory.

XXIII

ON MOTHERHOOD AND THE DUTIES IT IMPOSES

WHEN Mary, the model of all women, conceived in her womb the Word of Life, it was an angel who announced to her the mystery that was to take place. At the words of the angel, she could only reply: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" And it was only after the angel had reassured her, by telling her that the power of the Most High would alone produce in her the august mystery of motherhood, that she responded: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word."

Would that every woman might understand what this narration teaches her in its wonderful simplicity! Would that she, when God calls her to the sublime honor of motherhood, might feel in her soul, as it were, a counterpart of the chaste fears that Mary's soul experienced! May she, in her artless ignorance, have need, like Mary,

to be reassured! May she find a husband who, respecting her innocence and candor, will not make her forget the holy presence of her angel! May the august mystery of maternity accomplish itself in her as a religious and holy act, in thoughts of faith and aspirations of prayer, and, as it were, under the shadow of the power of the Most High!

She may then hope that what will be born of her will one day become holy and great before God. May she understand, and find a husband who understands also that woman should, in a certain sense, unite, after Mary's example, the precious gift of virginity and the sublime functions of maternity; because woman is, like Mary, called to be both virgin and mother in this sense, that her title of mother should not remove from her heart the chaste veil of innocence which protects its thoughts and desires.

Understand well your dignity and duties, O you who carry in your bosom a being whom God has redeemed by His blood on the cross of Calvary! Know how to rise above all the views of nature, and consider your state and duties, not with the eyes of imagination and the colors of poetry, but with the far surer gaze of faith. Your body is truly the temple of the Holy Ghost, and in this temple dwells a soul which,

according to the beautiful expression of Saint Paul, is *to grow for God's increase.*

Go often and present to God in His temple this being as a victim dedicated to His service. Let the blood of Him who purifies our hearts and bodies flow in your soul in holy communion. Respect your body, respect your soul, and walk always in the presence of God and His angels.

Then, when you behold the child God has given you, do not give yourself up to immoderate joy, but calmly face the new duties imposed on you. Hasten to regenerate in the waters of baptism this child who has, as yet, received only corporal life, and whose cries on coming into the world indicate to you that this life would be a sad gift to him if it were not to serve him as a support for the higher life of grace and understanding. When he has been brought back to you sanctified, regenerated, a child of God and of the Church, venerate in him the precious dignity that he has just received. And when you kiss his brow, think that you have in your arms a brother of the angels, a child all resplendent with purity and innocence, and let your caresses be mingled with a holy respect, which will restrain their expression within right bounds.

This child is set up for the ruin or resurrection of many, according to whether you bring him up

in the love of the world or in the fear of the Lord. In either case he will experience great contradictions; and as for you, poor mother, so happy to-day, a sword shall pierce your soul. These words of holy Simeon to Mary can, in a certain sense, be addressed to every mother; for is not maternal love like a sword which the hand of God plunges again and again into her soul?

A new future, a new career is opened to you, with new joys it is true, but also with sorrows hitherto unknown. Accept the former with gratitude and the latter with resignation, and devote your soul and whole life to the duties imposed on you by your new position.

In that child whom God has given you, and whose first education He intrusts to you, do not consider only a small, weak being, who claims your care and tenderness; but, looking beyond and piercing the veil of the future by hope, see in him a Christian, an elect to be formed, a numerous posterity, perhaps, to be reared, whose future will depend, in part, on the education you will impart to him who is to be its father. Who does not know, in fact, that there are families privileged, as it were, that preserve intact the precious heritage of faith and virtues, transmitted to them originally by a pious Christian mother?

Teach your child the name of his Father in Heaven before teaching him that of his father on earth. And as soon as his tongue is loosened, place on his lips the two names of Jesus and Mary, in order that God may have the first fruits of his mind and of his life. Take him early into the temple of the Lord, in order to accustom the angels to recognize in him a brother, and in order that his first impressions may come to him from heaven. His ear will become accustomed to the solemn and pious chants of the Church; his eyes will be pleased with the august splendor of her festivals, and prayer will appear to him like a necessity and a natural function of the soul. Let the duties of motherhood take precedence in your mind of all others; and as long as you can attend to their accomplishment, share them with no one. If you are obliged to call some one to your assistance, be prudent in the choice of the servants to whom you give your confidence, and do not allow them to give to your child, except under your eyes, the care that you are obliged to require of them. More than once the germ of some vice of the soul or of the body has been laid in the cradle of a child by a negligent or corrupt servant. This danger is frequent enough to claim all the vigilance and attention of a mother.

Take great care especially not to weaken the bodily constitution of your child by too delicate attentions, and to stifle his will in its germ by refusing nothing to his caprice. The moral education of man begins, as well as that of the body, on the first day of life, and perhaps there is more truth than one would suppose in these words of a Christian philosopher, that man will be all his life what he was on his mother's knees.

A child should feel at first and understand afterward that his whims will never be heeded, and that he must be schooled to obey. To obey is the whole secret of life; it is the function and principal duty of man; it is by this he must begin, by this he must end; for death is the last, and at the same time the greatest act, of obedience that God asks of us. He knows nothing, who does not know how to submit and obey. It is obedience alone which forms and develops the will and renders easy, afterward, the courageous resolutions and the painful sacrifices that circumstances exact of us at every moment. And if a mother should leave to her son, as the fruit of her cares, only the disposition to obey, she would still leave him the most precious and most useful faculty in life.

But, to teach your child to obey you must not only, from the beginning, resist his caprices; you

must, especially, never have any yourself, never demand of him anything unjust or unreasonable, never command anything so long as you are under the dominion of some passion, never punish him while you are still moved by impatience or anger, lest the punishment take in his eyes the appearance of personal revenge. Promise him nothing that you cannot grant, and never threaten him with a chastisement which you are not resolved to inflict, if he deserves it. He must have the most exalted opinion, not only of your heart and affection, but also, and especially, of your judgment and of your will. Therefore, in order to escape his importunities, never have recourse to falsehood or those ridiculous tales with which mothers and servants imprudently frighten the imagination of children, placing in their minds the root of those prejudices without foundation, those errors and childish fears which time and education often have much trouble to remove.

You will be useful to your children only so much as you inspire in them that respect and fear which have their roots in confidence and love, and which render obedience easy. Remember that God, in the precept by which He determines our obligations toward our parents, does not command us to love them, judging no doubt

that such recommendation were useless, but, indeed, to honor them. When you give a command to your children, do not enter into any argument with them to show that they must obey. Especially avoid inducing them through the hope of the personal advantages they may derive, for you would only develop in them the germ of egotism or selfishness; but make them understand that they must do the thing commanded through obedience to your authority, because you hold in their respect the place of God on earth, and that all your power comes from Him.

In this way elevate and ennoble obedience in their eyes, by making them see your authority from its true point of view, and endeavor to make it commendable to them by the gravity of your morals and your fidelity in accomplishing the law of God. Teach them that obedience is the condition of man below, that you yourself, as well as they, obey God, the Church, the laws, your husband, and that it is only through obedience that they will learn to command others in after years.

XXIV

ON THE EDUCATION OF YOUTH

IN proportion to the growth of children, the cares and anxieties of a mother increase. At last there comes a time when the education of the home will no longer suffice to their needs, either because the parents cannot devote the necessary time to it or because their minds and dispositions do not embrace the requisite conditions. It is then that a mother must let the child, hitherto nurtured with tenderness, depart from under her care and intrust him to strangers. These latter, if they understand well the nature of their duties, will, by their care and tender solicitude of him, soon make him forget that he has left his family. If all institutions of learning were what they should be, the education received in them would unquestionably be preferable, at least for young men, to that which they might receive at home. One destined for action and for the duties of public

life may well be put to the test betimes, in order that he may acquire more easily the qualities of mind and will that this life demands. Emulation, in fact, will develop the faculties of his intellect; his disposition will become more tractable in his constant relations with others of his own age; whatever the excessive indulgence of a mother may have left, in the shape of harshness in his will or caprice in his imagination, will soon disappear through continual friction with wills equally capricious, equally exacting. As between these wills the decision must be made either by the strength which supposes courage or by the reason and authority of an impartial master requiring obedience and docility.

One of the greatest advantages of public education is, without question, the equality which places a large number of children on the same level and under the same law, without regard to distinction of rank or fortune, which holds so large a place in the world. It may be said that the academy or college is society as it should be, since authority rests in the hands of men incontestably superior, through experience, age, and merit, to those who obey, and that the only distinctions that are recognized among the latter are based on the qualities of mind and heart. Moreover, in these institutions a child lays the

foundation for the future of relations that will be sweet and useful; and man, being made for society, can never multiply too much the bonds that bind him to it, because he is all the stronger for holding fast to more men, and for more men holding fast to him.

But it would not be safe to affirm in so positive a manner that public education is better suited to woman than the education she might receive in the family. Woman is not destined, as man is, to the functions of public life. God calls her to a more modest but not less useful rulership which she must exercise at home. The family is the sphere of activity reserved to woman, — that is her world. It seems, therefore, more natural, since her whole life is to be confined within this circle, that she should be trained from infancy to the duties that she will some day fulfill, and she should acquire there, either by practice or from her mother's example, the qualities and virtues that she must later on display. Emulation, generally useful to man, is often dangerous to woman; it easily degenerates and gives place to envy or discouragement. In a word, what renders public education advantageous to man is what renders it harmful to woman. It sometimes takes away from her that modesty and candor, that naïve simplicity and

innocence, so becoming to her soul, and gives her in place a curiosity and certain mental excitement which wearies. It sometimes takes away the taste for the modest occupations of the family which it ought, on the contrary, to inspire, and thereby renders women less capable for the accomplishment of their most important duties. Many persons of wide observation and experience in this matter believe that women whose education has been received at home are superior in their mental and moral qualities to those who have been otherwise trained.

But, as it is rare that circumstances allow mothers to devote themselves to their daughters' education, they should, at least, take every necessary precaution to find the advantages of the home in the school where they place them; and in their choice they should pay far less attention to those exterior and brilliant qualities that impart for a time to certain schools a false and fictitious reputation, but rather more to qualities, less apparent, but more sound, that will offer to a mother every guarantee which her solicitude can require. The same motive should guide mothers in the choice of the institutions where they wish to place their sons; for error in matters of this kind may have the most fatal consequences.

What they should seek above all is the strong-

est guarantees of morality. For of what avail is knowledge without virtue? And who would purchase it at the cost of innocence? Now this guarantee is not always easy to find in schools containing a large number of children, many of whom are reaching the age when the passions are developing and when one child alone suffices to ruin many others. The innocence of children can be preserved only by an extreme and continual watchfulness; and this watchfulness is possible only so far as those who are charged to exercise it are fully penetrated with the importance of their duties and are influenced in its accomplishment by a religious and conscientious motive.

Religion alone, let us not conceal it, can be a salutary check to the passions at the age when they begin to develop, and when the will which is still weak cannot oppose to them in its energy a sufficient counterpoise. The ignorance of evil may, it is true, preserve the heart of a child; but as soon as the evil is known to his mind and solicits his heart, he can find refuge only in piety and in the helps it places at his disposal. Now, in order that he may feel the need of this help and may call upon it, religion must surround his whole life with its divine influence, must present itself to him in the teachings and ex-

amples of his masters and in the fervor of his schoolmates.

Attention and watchfulness, therefore, O mothers! For it is not too much to say, if you place your children in schools where religion is not considered the most important affair in education, they may be corrupted there, and form habits that will bring to you sorrow and shame. The possibilities of evil are great and undeniable. The majority of the men whose conduct disgusts you and whose principles frighten you, have brought back from the educational institutions where they were trained the corruption festering in their bones and the unbelief that has withered their souls.

Distrust your innocence. It may be fatal to that of your children, by lulling you into a deceitful security and by making you consider as impossible disorders that your hearts cannot suspect. It belongs especially to the husbands to take the initiative and to counsel in this matter. Would they have their children see and hear what the majority among them have seen and heard in their childhood days in the schools where they were educated? And would they not rather see them ignorant all their lives than to give them learning at the cost of what man holds most precious?

The dangers, to be sure, are less great for women, whose training is intrusted to religious orders which place piety and innocence above all other advantages. Religion occupies an important place in the education of women. Their nature, moreover, is more chaste than that of man, and imposes on them a certain reserve, from which the latter ofttimes considers himself exempt. The corrupt man often glories in his corruption, and even often tries to appear more vicious than he really is. Woman, on the other hand, conceals from the eyes of others the faults caused by her weakness.

This difference lessens, therefore, the dangers that may threaten her innocence in the schools where she is educated; but it does not make them all disappear. Curiosity urges her to indiscreet questions or rash researches. The natural tenderness of her heart sometimes delivers her defenceless to a friend less innocent and reserved. These considerations suffice to make a mother watchful and scrupulous in the choice of the establishment where she places her daughters; for on this choice may depend, in great part, their happiness and the direction of their whole lives. Let them be very careful not to put them, from ambitious or selfish views, in schools where they may acquire tastes and habits

of grandeur, luxury, or vanity not suitable to their station in life, and liable to make them despise it later; in schools where they may be in relation with children of a higher rank than their own, and who, through disdain or pride, will wound their self-love and excite their jealousy. Let her, also, avoid those institutions where the essential is sacrificed to the accessory; where accomplishments hold more place in education than useful things; where the ordinary occupations of the family and the home are neglected, and where women are accustomed to look on work as beneath them. Accomplishments, as music and drawing, should, no doubt, have their place in a woman's education, and there will probably be many occasions in her life when they will offer her a kindly diversion; but they must not absorb all her time, and make her neglect more important occupations to which she will have to devote the greatest part of her life. Finally, let mothers consult God before making their choice, and after having made it, let them bless Him if it be fortunate; for God has granted them the most precious grace He can bestow on a mother.

XXV

EVE AND MARY, EDEN AND NAZARETH

WHEN Satan wished to ruin the human race, he tried his fatal artifices on woman; and, to succeed more surely in his object, he sought to rouse in her two sentiments which, from that time, have occupied a large place in her heart, and played an important rôle in her life. "You shall be as gods," said he, "knowing good and evil." The two-fold desire to know good and evil and to be like gods, in other words, curiosity and vanity, have been ever since two powerful motives swaying the heart of many women. What happened once in the earthly paradise has very often since been repeated. Many times, in fact, woman's curiosity and vanity have introduced into the home a leaven of corruption and sin which has developed and infected whole generations.

It is nearly always through the woman that the moral ruin of a family begins, just as it was through her that the ruin of the human race began. The woman who yields to the attraction of evil soon entices her husband and the children

God has given her. So long as she fulfills her duties, so long as the spirit of Christianity and the love of virtue are yet alive in her heart, she maintains a certain order in the family and opposes a good counterpoise to the disorders of an unbelieving or corrupt husband. And this fact we see reproduced every moment under our eyes, since it is to women that we owe those precious remnants of faith and Christian virtues that have been preserved in families.

But daily experience shows at the same time that, when the wife is unruly in her conduct, or imperfectly settled in her principles, nothing can counterbalance the fatal influence of her examples in the home. One often sees a Christian wife bring back to God, through her prayers or the examples of her life, a husband or a son gone astray in the paths of wickedness. But rarely has the Christian husband led back to the paths of virtue a wife who has departed from them. It was a woman who plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil, and introduced therewith sin into the world. It was a woman who gave us the fruit of the tree of life, whence has come to us salvation and redemption. But what a difference between Eve's conduct and Mary's, between the curiosity and vanity of the first and the humility of the second! Eve, far

from being frightened at the apparition of the seducing angel, permits herself to converse with him. Mary is terrified and alarmed at the presence of an angel. Eve yields to the double attraction of curiosity and pride; the desire to become like gods triumphs over the fear she has of displeasing God by disobeying Him. Mary, on the contrary, is dismayed at the sublime dignity that the angel promises her; and preferring to the signal honor of being the mother of God the more humble condition of His servant, she consents to accept the dignity offered her only after having fully assured herself that it is not incompatible with the precious gift of virginity, which she is resolved to preserve above all else. Eve, observing that the fruit offered her is agreeable to the sight, and desiring to experience the marvellous effects that God attributed to it, picks it from the tree and eats it against the express command of the Lord. Mary, sure of remaining a virgin, though becoming the mother of God, humbly accepts the eminent dignity that the angel proposes to her, in order to obey the Lord's behest.

Eve and Mary, such are the two types, the two models between which every woman must choose, and whose conduct she must reproduce in her life. If, influenced by curiosity or vanity,

she seeks to know what she is commanded to ignore, and to experience the things that should remain a mystery to her mind and heart; if she would resemble God rather in knowledge than in goodness of heart and innocence of life, she will be the first victim of her fatal delusions, and you will surely see her spread in the family of which she is the source and guardian the germs of death which she herself has assimilated.

If, on the other hand, directed by the spirit that animates Mary, she prefers to the eminent, but difficult and dangerous, duties of an exalted condition, the simple and easy ones of a humble and hidden life; if she refuses to argue with the restless desires of her heart and to entertain the strange doubts of her mind, she will conceive in her soul, through faith and sincere piety, the word of life; and producing outwardly, through the practice of Christian virtues, the precious germ that has developed in her, she will prepare the promise and salvation of many generations, who will bless her some day for the examples of virtue she shall have left them, nay more, who will increase her glory in heaven with all the splendor of their own glory.